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ED'S NOTE

NOVEMBER 2015

MIDRANGE MADNESS!

One of the more confusing things we have to deal with as tech journalists is the ever-evolving subcategories for each and every gadget. Back in the day, we instantly knew what we were holding when we received a review unit at the office, but nowadays, a smartphone isn't just a phone anymore, likewise for notebooks and tablets.

This isn't something totally new in the industry, and it's only natural that devices continuously grow in ways we can hardly predict. The same thing is happening with cars, wherein crossovers, SUVs, and compact sedans are branching out to even more divisions. While our team is able to dissect each one and convey accurate stories based on our thorough understanding, we sympathize with consumer confusion, since we're regular victims ourselves.

Our shootouts and reviews this month are good examples of the diversity we face in consumer technology. The mainstream flagship smartphone shootout, for instance, is certainly a mouthful, but that's because midrangers aren't simply right in between low- and high-end devices anymore. We've got middlings that sell for as low as PhP 7,000 and some that might as well be part of the premium class of flagships (we're looking at you, Sony Xperia M5). Our Ford EcoSport review, which you can find on page 38, also mixes and matches the best of both ends, producing an "in-betweener" that satisfies more than one group of consumers.

It's definitely puzzling, and companies can't avoid it either, but we welcome the challenge with open arms. After all, this is a sign that manufacturers are being more creative, and with that creativity, we have a lot more toys to play with.

The HWM Team

Comments about this issue? Suggestions? The HWM Team would love to hear from you! Send us your thoughts at editor.ph@hwzcorp.com.

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ARE WE READY FOR CONNECTED CARS?

The modern automobile is incredibly smart. It can connect to the web to stream entertainment content, traffic information, and more. Some are so intelligent they can perform self-diagnostics without needing to go to the workshop. But are we ready for them?

by *Kenny Yeo*



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In today's fast-paced and increasingly connected world, we demand everything to be online. The first were our computers, then our phones, and now, it seems that there's a need for connected versions of everything. If you look around, you can even find a smart flowerpot that can learn when the best time to water its plant is. And since research tells us that we are spending more time stuck in our cars than ever, it makes sense to have connected cars, too.

On the most basic level, cars that can connect to the Internet can have a much wider selection of entertainment options, through music streaming apps or online radio stations. On a more advanced level, some are able to quickly alert emergency services should an accident occur; they can even transmit preliminary accident reports and notify relevant specialists about the type of accident and what kind of help needs to be rendered. Needless to say, such connected cars make day-to-day living more pleasant and are also safer to drive.

However, being connected brings about a set of new problems, especially with the recent spate of digital security breaches and hacks, and cars are no exception it seems.

In late July, a report surfaced that documented how a Jeep Cherokee could be hacked. A pair of hackers, Charlie Miller and Chris Valasek, sent commands to a test vehicle – a 2014 Jeep Cherokee – to demonstrate a program they developed that would allow them to remotely control the vehicle. In a video showcasing their hack, they fiddled with the air-conditioning, blasted the in-car entertainment system, and also turned on the wipers, all while seated miles away from the car in the comfort of their home. On a more serious note, they also showed that they could control the car's steering, kill the engine and even disable the brakes.

"A pair of hackers, Charlie Miller and Chris Valasek, sent commands to a test vehicle – a 2014 Jeep Cherokee – to demonstrate a program they developed that would allow them to remotely control the vehicle."

Not long after, researchers at the University of California in San Diego also demonstrated how they could remotely hack a 2013 Chevrolet Corvette via a connected insurance dongle. This dongle is designed for use by insurance companies and trucking fleets to monitor a vehicle's location, speed, and efficiency. The researchers found that by sending SMS messages to these dongles, they could transmit commands to the car's CAN bus and remotely control the car. The CAN bus is



PICTURE **CHEVROLET**



an internal network that is used to control a car's physical driving components. Stefan Savage, the computer security professor who led the project at the university, gave a damning verdict about his findings and said that these dongles provided multiple ways in which hackers can use to remotely control just about anything on vehicles.

Now, ever since the first Model T rolled out from the Ford Factories, automakers have been obsessed with security, but of a different kind. Thanks to inventions like the seat belt, air bags, anti-lock brakes, crumple zones, and side impact beams, cars have never been safer than they are today. A recent test showed that in a head-on a collision at similar speeds, a Renault Modus supermini with a 5-star NCAP rating will actually fare better than a large Volvo 944 Estate, even if the latter was about 500kg heavier.

However, it's time for automakers to start focusing on a different type of security – cyber security. The problem is automakers' inexperience in the workings of the cyber world and naivety when it comes to security protocols.

Security researcher Samy Kamkar recently demonstrated a bug in GM's OnStar service that would allow a hacker to impersonate an owner and gain access to the car. He also said that this bug could possibly work for BMW and Mercedes-Benz cars. "Some of the things that I'm finding are not crazy. I'm finding very common vulnerabilities that have been known about for at least a decade in the cyber security world," Kamkar said. More worryingly, he also stated that security researchers are only scratching the surface of what is possible.

Fortunately, there's a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Some automakers and companies have recognized that more needs to be done. Chrysler, the parent company of Jeep, quickly issued a recall of 1.4 million vehicles after Miller and Valasek alerted them of their cars' vulnerability. Metromile, the insurance company involved in the insurance dongle hack described earlier, also swiftly released a security patch to all of its devices after learning about the hack. Metromile CEO Dan Preston also said, "We took this very seriously as soon as we found out."

Others, however, are reluctant to admit that there's a problem. A spokesperson from Mercedes-Benz, for instance, wrote in response to Kamkar's claims that the company does not wish to "engage in speculation about potential hacks (often the result of extreme manipulation) that have very little likelihood of occurring in the real world and create unnecessary concern."

Cyber security surround connected cars was a top topic at this year's DEF CON hacking conference, and security researchers all agreed that more needs to be done to make connected cars more secure. However, that would require the cooperation of automakers. As for now, the next time you are buying a car, better think twice before ticking that option box for that Internet-connect in-car entertainment system.







Head-Turner

To celebrate Nissan Philippines Inc.'s second year in the country, the manufacturer brought to the local market the compact crossover that comes with a quirky look and affordable price tag, the Nissan Juke. The all-new Nissan Juke is the company's answer to the growing need for compact crossovers. It brings forth the ability to deftly take on the challenges of tight roads and everyday city driving in the Philippines.

The Juke will be available in the HR16DE 1.6 DOHC gasoline engine variant with the new-generation Xtronic Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT). Its engine is expected to deliver 116ps of power with 154Nm of torque.



Premium Mobile

Sony Mobile launched its latest lineup of smartphones in the Philippines: the Xperia Z5, Xperia Z5 Compact, and Xperia Z5 Premium. Sony Philippines President and Managing Director, Noboyushi Otake, opened the launch event saying that smartphones are a part of people's lives, and that Sony is focused on bringing out the latest innovations in camera, design, and display in order to cope with the growing consumer demands.

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- TN Panel





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Merry Cherry Christmas

In a press event held in New World Hotel Makati, Cherry Mobile introduced the latest member of its family, Piolo Pascual. Along with this, Cherry Mobile announced its #CherryChristmas promo, which will allow lucky OFWs to be reunited with their families here in the Philippines to celebrate Christmas together. Cherry Mobile will fly lucky winners home for free just in time for Christmas. The promo is open to all active Filipino Facebook users who have a family member abroad.

Everything-Proof

Altec Lansing announced its newest range of outdoor audio solutions, which are dubbed "everything-proof," as they are rated IP67 waterproof, dustproof, and shockproof. The durable speakers consist of the Life Jacket, Mini H20, and Jacket H20. Altec Lansing's release of its new lineup harkens back to the roots of the company, innovating the audio scene when it first started all the way back in 1927.





Fashion Revolution

Armed with cameras and clad in red, Canon Marketing Philippines, Inc., together with famous photographers and some members of the Canon Crusaders of Light, Ibarra Deri, Wesley Villarica, and Sara Black, dedicated one great evening to fashion and portrait photography through the "Canon Pro Night: Fashion Revolution" event. To give the audience a chance at fashion photography, an open shoot was held. Canon loyalists also got to enjoy treats and deals from Canon.

The Next TVolution

PLDT has partnered up with Intel to launch the TVolution Stick, which is based on Intel's own Compute Stick. It's a fully operational computer that's the size of a pocketable dongle and connects to your monitor or television through an HDMI port. With it, you'll be able to stream from PLDT's iflix service, play light games, surf the web, watch movies, and do pretty much anything that's possible on a regular desktop PC.





Out of This World

AOC has partnered with a powerhouse in the global entertainment industry, Twentieth Century Fox. With the company's first product placement in a major Hollywood film, AOC became the official monitor partner of "The Martian," the well-received sci-fi adventure flick from master director Ridley Scott. In line with the theme of the movie, AOC supports the spirit of technological discovery and exploration, and so unveiled the I2769VM, which is a new ultra-slim monitor with narrow bezels.



Another Series of Incredible

ASUS recently launched several new notebooks and all-in-one solutions powered by Intel's latest sixth-generation processors and Microsoft's Windows 10 OS. These include the ZenBook Pro UX501 Ultrabook, ZenBook UX305LA Ultrabook, ASUS X555UB value-packed notebook, ROG G752 gaming notebook, ROG GL552 gaming notebook, G501 gaming notebook, and last but not least, the Zen AiO Pro. They're all available already, and can be found in ASUS shops across the country.

For the Hardcore Fans

Globe has made the Sphero BB-8 available for purchase in its GEN3 stores. For the unfamiliar, BB-8 will appear in "Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens," and will hopefully mimic the star power of R2-D2. The Sphero BB-8 is a miniaturized version of the round droid, and can be controlled using a smartphone and the partnered app. Globe advises Star Wars fanatics to take advantage of the offer before they're all sold out.





Shockingly Special

Casio has brought its G-Factory Premium store to the Philippines, which is only the second of its kind in the world. Among the watches found in the shop are the G-Shock MRG-G1000, MTG-G1000D, Gulfmaster GWN-1000, Gravitymaster GPW-1000T, Mudmaster GWG-1000, and Oceanus OCW-G1000, to name a few. The collection is abundant, so it's best you see the selection for yourself to truly appreciate the offerings. The store can be found on the second floor of Greenbelt 5 in Makati City.

Selfie Prints

Fujifilm has just come out with the Instax Mini 70, which is more selfie-centric and has better low-light abilities than its predecessors. What makes the Mini 70 special is its auto exposure control, which is what you'd find on full-fledged shooters. In this case, it will allow you to get both the subject and background clearly lit in the picture. The great thing about this is that it's all automatic, just like the feature implies.





Rocking Mobile

Acer Philippines unveiled a bunch of tablets and smartphones last month, but it was the Predator 8 gaming tablet, Predator 6 gaming smartphone, and Liquid Jade Primo Windows 10 device that stole the spotlight. What makes the two Predator devices special is their gaming capabilities, thanks to high-end mobile SoCs and surround sound speakers. The Liquid Jade Primo, on the other hand, supports Windows Continuum, enabling it to turn into a full-fledged PC when connected to a monitor.



The Lucky Winner

AirAsia and Nikon Award the Best Travel Photographer for 2015

From the four office workers chosen to participate at AirAsia Travel Photographer 2015, including a car salesman and a barista, the online votes have been tallied and 36-year old Velvet Lagman took home the grand prize.

Mentored by Malaysian photojournalist Adam Lee, Velvet received the coveted title of AirAsia's Best Travel Photographer of 2015, along with 100,000 AirAsia BIG Points and a Nikon D5500 with an 18-55mm lens kit. The photo contest is jointly organized by AirAsia and ThinkDharma Inc., the exclusive distributor of Nikon Digital Cameras, in partnership with AirAsia BIG, the airline's global loyalty program.

Lucky voter grand prize winner Mia Celindro also received 100,000 AirAsia BIG Points and a Nikon 1 J5, while ten other lucky voting contestants were awarded with AirAsia BIG Points, plus other goodies from Nikon.

Assisted by acclaimed photographers from the Philippines and Malaysia as their personal coaches, four pre-selected contestants traveled across Asia for one week, which started last July 21. Contestants were tasked to capture unforgettable moments in categories: landscape, food, portrait, architecture, and travel. Online voting via www.airasiatravelphotographer.com was opened to the public on August 20 and concluded on September 5, 2015.

AirAsia Philippines' Head of Commercial, Gerard Penaflor, opened the ceremony and joined in the ribbon-cutting of the photojournalists' exhibit featuring pictures taken on the contest leg. ThinkDharma Inc., meanwhile, was represented by Lady Dianne Abarintos, who closed the program.

Keep updated with the next leg of the AirAsia Travel Photography contest by using the hashtag #IamAirAsiaTravelPhotographer, and receive the latest updates via Twitter at **www.twitter.com/AirAsiaPh** or Facebook at **www.facebook.com/AirAsiaPhilippines**.

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TAP FOR WEBSITE

Smart Surf Abroad 550 Lets You Enjoy Worry-Free Data Roaming in 110 Countries

You can now make the most out of your overseas getaways and experience the Smart Life in over 110 countries with the new Surf Abroad 550, which is a data roaming package from Smart Communications.

Now, you can stay online while traveling abroad without the worries of "bill shock." Initially available to all Smart postpaid subscribers for PhP 550 per day, Surf Abroad 550 promises worry-free data roaming experience with automatic registration and network lock feature.

According to Tina Mariano, Head of Smart Global Access and International Services, "mobile Internet, or the lack of it, can make or break a vacation abroad," particularly since mobile apps and most valuable information are now available online. They have updated the Surf Abroad 550 to be "a lot easier, convenient, and totally bill shock-free."

The Surf Abroad 550 data roaming package now has automatic registration, which means you simply have to turn on your mobile data setting to enjoy online connectivity at your destination. There's no more need to key in special codes, register via text, or call the hotline. Once the service is active, you will also get timely notifications so you're completely informed of your subscription.

The new Surf Abroad 550 from Smart Communications is also powered by network-lock technology, which automatically steers and locks your phone onto Smart's roaming partner networks, eliminating the hassle of having to manually select every time. With this feature in place, you won't have to worry about incurring unwanted charges and bill shock when you return from your vacation.

Mariano has no doubt in her mind that the Smart Surf Abroad 550 is one of the "top travel essentials" needed for a truly awesome trip and a Smart Life experience abroad.

For more information, you can visit **www.smart.com.ph/roam**.



POWER-SAVING PARTNERSHIP

APC by Schneider Partners with Power Mac Center

TAP FOR WEBSITE

Most people have some kind of mobile device these days. While on the go, however, one doesn't always have the convenience of a wall socket to charge his or her device. With that in mind, APC by Schneider has released its line of power packs, partnering with Power Mac Center for distribution.

The flagship power pack, the APC MB10K, packs 10000mAh, while its little brother, the APC MB5K, sports a 5000mAh battery capacity. Both power packs feature a durable and reliable Li-polymer battery, as well as an automatic on and off function for efficient charging.

Bloggers and power couple Chuckie and Yen Dreyfus were present at the event to attest to the efficiency of the APC MB10K.

APC by Schneider Electric has partnered with Power Mac Center for the distribution of its new line of power packs. At this time, they are offering all customers who purchase the APC MB10K through Power Mac Center with a PhP 500 discount. The promo will run until December 31, 2015 at ten participating Power Mac Center outlets: Greenbelt, Rockwell, Mall of Asia, Trinoma, SM North Edsa, Megamall, SM Aura, SM Marikina, Festival Mall, and Robinson's Magnolia.

You can go to **www.powermaccenter.com** and **www.apc.com** for more details.

PRIORITIZING SECURITY

TAP FOR WEBSITE

Kaspersky Lab Unveils New Line of Protection Solutions for Consumers

Kaspersky Lab recently unveiled its new line of flagship security solutions fitted with updated privacy features, which are aimed to protect Filipino users' private lives.

The new line is equipped with enhanced privacy features and has been developed specifically with privacy, data, identity, money, and the device itself in mind. It comes in three flavors: Kaspersky Internet Security (KIS), Kaspersky Anti-Virus (KAV), and Kaspersky Internet Security – Multi-Device (KIS-MID). All three are available for Windows, OS X, and Android.

Based on the company's Consumer IT Security Risks Survey 2015, there has been a surge of users who are concerned about their online privacy compared to last year. There are 70 percent of users who are concerned that someone could gain access to their personal files, 61 percent worry that there may be programs on their devices collecting information about them, while 49 percent do not trust their own webcams. With these concerns in mind, Kaspersky Lab has tailored its solutions to combat these problems, updating their solutions with several new important features.

Visit **www.kaspersky.com.ph** to know more about Kaspersky's latest security solutions.

READY FOR AN EXPANSION

TAP FOR WEBSITE

Epson to Triple Inkjet Printhead Production with New Factory in Japan

To increase production capacity of printheads for inkjet printers, Akita Epson Corporation, a group company of Seiko Epson Corporation (SEC), announced that it will invest a total of approximately 3.4 billion yen (approximately US$ 28 million) on the construction of a new factory.

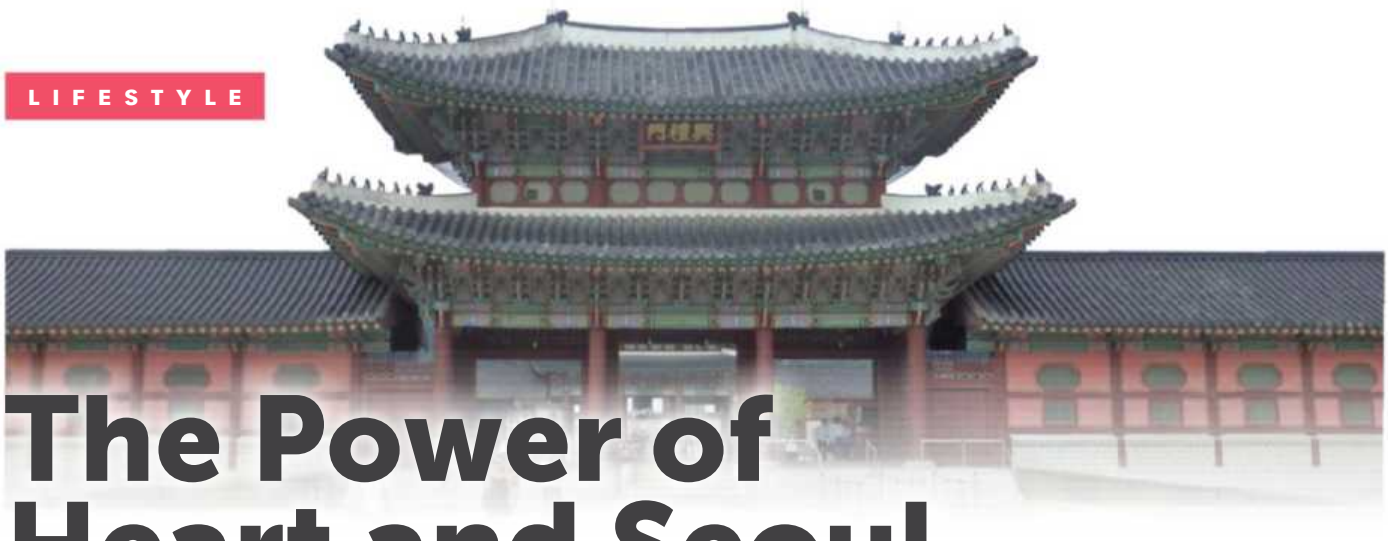
The construction of the new factory, which will begin operations in the autumn of 2016, will begin in November 2015.

Epson's printing solutions business provides products and services based on original Micro Piezo inkjet technology to customers in the consumer, office, commercial, and industrial markets. The new factory at Akita Epson will manufacture and assemble inkjet printheads, which are the core devices used in Epson's high-capacity ink tank printers and business inkjet printers.

Epson's high-capacity ink tank printers are new concept products that meet the customer needs for low printing costs while providing genuine Epson print quality.

In the Philippines, Epson's ink tank system printers were instrumental in propelling the digital imaging leader to the number one position.

Learn more about Epson printers and its latest products and services at **www.epson.com.ph**.



The Power of Heart and Seoul

Whether you go solo or with a group, you'll never go wrong with Seoul

TRAVEL

What makes Seoul an ideal travel destination is that it's a modern yet history-rich city where one can experience its preserved traditional culture and, at the same time, its cosmopolitan urbanity.

Last September, I went on a four-day trip to Seoul, which was already my second. My first was in the autumn of 2012 when I visited some UNESCO World Heritage sites in and out Seoul. But in my recent trip, I focused on discovering more of the city.

When deciding on where to go in Seoul, just follow your heart, and choose what you love. In my case, I like Korean dramas, so I decided to visit some of the shoot locations of my favorite K-dramas. First stop was the Geongbokgung Palace, one of the sets of The Rooftop Prince. Luckily, I also got to witness the "changing of the guards" ceremony. Next stop was the Mangosix Café (Apgujeong Branch) in Gangnam, the set of A Gentleman's Dignity. However, it has been renovated and is now known as Koffisix Coffee. I got pretty disappointed and wished I visited the Daechi-dong branch, one of the shoot locations of The Heirs, instead. Lastly, I tagged along some Seoul-based Filipino friends to visit the shoot location of The 1st Shop of Coffee Prince in Hongdae.

For couples, a popular destination is the N Seoul Tower in Namsan Mountain, which can be reached through a bus or a cable car from Myeongdong. This is where couples express their love by putting love locks in the railings of the viewing deck, just like those in the Pont des Arts Bridge in Paris.

My three favorite neighborhoods in Seoul are Hongdae, Myeongdong, and Gangnam. Hongdae is known as the university area (where Hongik University is). This is where the youth goes for shopping, dining, and clubbing. Foreign and local fashion brands, street food, and mid-end restaurants, plus bars/clubs, are found here. Myeongdong is a shopping haven, where numerous beauty and fashion brands are; and trust me, they're priced three times less there than abroad. Gangnam is where high-end brands and the elites are, and is perfect for celebrity spotting.

Don't worry about the expenses, because it's not as expensive as you'd think. Well, that's for you to experience, so book your flight, pack your bags, and prepare to have fun!



"Changing of the Guards" ceremony at the gates of the Geongbokgung Palace



My #OOTD on a bipolar kind of weather. It's quite hot in the day, but gets a bit chilly at night.



Myeongdong Shopping District: Move over Disneyland, this is the happiest place on earth for me!

TEXT AND PICTURES **ROYCIE SALEN**



Stepping Up the Beer Game

Pinoy-made craft beers can go world-class, too!

Filipinos are certified beer lovers. From simple hangouts to big parties, beer is always a part of almost every Filipino gathering. Typical beer drinkers consume highly commercialized local beers; but, these days, the craft beers produced by local microbrewers are gradually changing the drinking scene.

With the emergence of locally produced craft beers in the local alcoholic beverage industry, Filipinos are offered with a more diverse selection when it comes to flavors and beer profile.

As defined by the Brewers Association, craft brewers are those that are small, independent, and traditional. Craft beer may be produced in small volumes, but it steps up the Filipino beer game. These local craft beers can actually go up against imported beers because of their world-class quality.

I recently got to visit the state-of-the-art brewing facility of a new local craft brewer in Imus, Cavite. While other microbrewers do brewing manually and in small workspaces, Great Islands Craft Brewery uses high-tech equipment in a big work area, making it the biggest craft brewery in the Philippines.

Great Islands takes pride in its Master Brewer, Allan "Baldis" Agala, who graduated from the World Brewing Academy in the Siebel Institute of Chicago. Another brilliant mind behind GICB is Mags Villafuerte, an importer and distributor of alcoholic beverages and one of the co-founders of The Beer Club of Manila, a beer enthusiast group that aims to educate Filipinos about beer and beer styles. Completing the team is Mario McDermott, a passionate American beer brewer who used to brew beer back in his hometown in Texas before moving to the Philippines as a microbiology scientist in a multinational pharmaceutical company.

Great Islands presents a wide range of beer flavors. Two of its seasonal flavors are the Halo-Halo Ale, inspired by the famous Filipino dessert that is perfect for summer, and the Bicol Express Wild Chili Ale, inspired by the famous spicy dish from the Bicol region. Its all-year-round flavors are the 7107 Wheat Ale and its bestseller, the Pearl of the Orient Indio Pale Ale. The latter goes perfectly with Filipino "pulutan," such as sisig, crispy pata, and adobo.

You can now enjoy these interesting local craft beer flavors in the following establishments: The Bottle Shop, The Perfect Pint, Chihuahua, Buffalo Wings and Things, Big Bad Wolf, and Belle and Dragon.





Mags Villafuerte (on the left) and Master Brewer Allan "Baldis" Agala check their freshest brew after a week in the fermenter.



The resulting liquid called "wort" is transferred to these cold tanks or fermenters that convert the mixture of ingredients into alcohol.



The beer bottling process is completed with this bottle-capping machine.



A Sense of Luxury

City Garden Grand Hotel Presidential Suite

HOTEL

The City Garden Grand Hotel is a lovely hotel popular with business travelers. It's nestled in the middle of the bustling city of Makati, providing easy access to the business district. We had the privilege to take a tour of the hotel and spend a night at their luxurious Presidential Suite.

The Presidential Suite is located on the 32nd floor, which is one of top floors in the hotel. It is the biggest room among the 311 units in the entire hotel. It is composed of a large dining/meeting area, a living room, a bedroom, and one-and-a-half bathrooms. Adding a sophisticated touch is a huge in-room jacuzzi that is located right across the living room area.

Once we stepped inside, we immediately felt that this is how the rich live. The room offers a very spacious, elaborate, and expensive home that is very comfortable to stay in. The flow of wide space – from the dining/meeting area to the living area, to the bedroom and the warm earth tones – gave us a zen vibe. It can be expanded further, as it can be connected to all the rooms on the same floor. The expansive area is ideal for families and a small group of friends. The suite features remarkable ornaments such as brown onyx stone on the luggage rack, synthetic pig skin on the headboard, Italian-glazed stones in the bathrooms, and narra-made doors and floors.

It is typical for large suites to have a jacuzzi, but this is the first one we have seen with a party-sized jacuzzi. You can take a dip in it while you unwind and look at a nice view of Makati, thanks to its floor-to-ceiling windows that are neatly covered with white and thin curtains. It is best to enjoy this view at night with all the city lights turned on, just before you go to sleep.

The large dining table can accommodate ten people. The area can also be used to hold small business meetings and other functions. A flatscreen TV is installed at one end, and there is a small, cozy area beside it where people can simply lounge around.

The bedroom is as large as a regular hotel room in its entirety. There are several chairs around where people can sit and move about. There is also a small home-office space that has a very comfortable swivel chair where you can do quick work-related tasks.

The main bathroom is immense, as well. It comes with a his-and-her sink, a dressing table, a rainfall shower, a free-standing bathtub, and self-contained toilet. The wall sconces add a more relaxing feel to the room.

The City Garden Grand Hotel's Presidential Suite is a room of its own kind, which is way out of the ordinary. It takes relaxation to new heights, as it offers a plush and pleasant place to stay for anyone who can afford it.











Jacuzzi Party

Installed inside the Presidential Suite is a large jacuzzi that can easily fit eight to ten people. It is located right beside a series of huge floor-to-ceiling windows that gives a nice panoramic view of Makati's skyline. During the day, it shows a backdrop of the city that keeps on moving. At night, the city lights illuminate the business district. It is best enjoyed with the bubbles turned on and a glass of bubbly.



Free-Standing

On one end of the en-suite bathroom is a free-standing bathtub that is embellished by the light from wall sconces for a more relaxing feel. Use it to ease up your tiring day with a warm bubble bath. On the other side is a walk-in shower with a large rainfall showerhead. The bathroom is fully stocked with imported toiletries that envelope the entire room with a fragrant scent. The his-and-her basins are perfect for couples.



Well Rested

The spacious bedroom truly shows crafted comfort and convenience. The king-sized bed with 500-thread-count duvet and goose down pillows inside the Presidential Suite is sure to give a good night's sleep. Retiring for a day to recharge is enjoyed best under its comfortable sheets. Turn down the lights and be well rested in the quiet night, without noticing the busy city around.

Q + A



BEN LOO, PRESIDENT, SWITCH

Tell us about the products and services you are currently offering.

Switch is one of the seven Tier 1 Apple resellers in the country. We started eight years ago with an island kiosk in Alabang Town Center. Back then, we only had two employees: Jeff Beltran, who is our Area Manager now, and myself. Today, we are seventeen branches strong, covering the south and all the way up north in Baguio City. The company's main focus is to provide the best retail experience for its customers. Aside from our retail presence, Switch also has education and enterprise teams that specialize in providing educational institutions a framework for 21st century learning, as well as real-world business solutions for enterprise clients. Each of our education and enterprise teams prides itself with pre-sales and post-sales personnel. Both work hand in hand to provide customized solutions for every client endeavor.

What advantages do you have over your rivals?

First and foremost, we are an Apple Premium Reseller. We are also an accredited Apple Premium Service Provider. We were very fortunate to garner this distinction in 2014, and hope to continue offering the best Apple experience to our customers. We are also an Apple Authorized Education Reseller and Enterprise Reseller. We pride ourselves in providing solutions to all our customer needs.

What are your flagship products, and where can we find your stores?

We showcase the entire Apple product line, both hardware and software. To complement the Apple products, we also have third-party accessories that provide our customers the option to dress up or accessorize their Apple products.

You can find our stores pretty much scattered in the Metro. We have presence down south in Alabang, Cavite, and Laguna. In Metro Manila, our stores are located in Glorietta, Bluebay Walk, UP-Technohub, and UP Town Center. Further up north, we are in Ayala Marquee Mall and in Camp John Hay, Baguio.

Are you planning to add more products to your lineup or open more stores in the country in the near future?

We are definitely looking for new and innovative products to showcase in our stores. We are particularly interested in wearables, health and fitness, and home automation. This is something we believe will be the next big thing. With regards to expanding our branch network, we are always seeking new areas and markets to expand to. We believe that the Apple market is just starting. Based on my approximation, the adoption rate of Apple in the Philippines is just about 10 percent. Thus, there is a huge market that can switch to Apple. In the pipeline for 2015, we are scheduled to open three more stores in Las Pinas, Antipolo, and Tagaytay.

HYPERX

WARNING

LISTEN UP!
YOU'RE SURROUNDED





HyperX
CLOUD II

The HyperX Cloud II Headset delivers an unparalleled auditory experience that captures every sound and movement on the battlefield. Equipped with 7.1 virtual surround sound and a built-in DSP sound card, it transforms fantasy into reality. The boom on the HyperX Cloud II transports you to a virtual world and puts you right at the center of the action.



Gun Metal



Pink

hyperxgaming.com

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Kingston TECHNOLOGY

Q + A



LG OLED TV

Perfect Black, Perfect Color

TONY AN,
VP FOR HOME
ENTERTAINMENT DIVISION,
LG ELECTRONICS PHILIPPINES

What are the unique consumer benefits of OLED technology?
The standard LCD TV has back panels that emit white LED lights, but OLED (Organic Light Emitting Diode) technology revolutionizes the norm and does not rely on backlights at all. Its display comprises individual pixels that are self-contained units of colored light, and this makes any black image onscreen a true solid black. Like movie theaters creating pitch-black darkness for the best viewing experience, or dazzling stars shining the most bright in the blackest nights, only perfect black brings perfect colors to life. To reach the realm of pure black in TVs, we moved on from the backlights of the past and introduced the world's first OLED TV.

Our OLED TVs are also instilled with self-lighting pixels, which means every pixel can switch on and off individually. The display can turn on its organic light entirely to achieve that intense black, letting viewers depict the most subtle details and appreciate the most vivid contrasting colors. LG's OLED TV, the first and only TV that creates perfect black for perfect color, truly is the TV of the future, and from there, we were able to develop our latest slim Curved 4K OLED TV for a seamlessly immersive viewing experience.

How has LG pioneered this technology that led to the creation of the world's first TV with a perfectly curved design?
True to its mantra, "Innovation for a Better Life," LG always puts consumers at the heart of every product and service. It takes years of extensive research and consumer insight to be able to develop the most advanced technology that embraces today's increasingly digital lifestyle. World's first innovations like the Curved 4K OLED TV are what make LG Electronics a global technology trailblazer.

Do you see the Philippine market embracing this new innovation? What are your expectations?
We believe that there is a market here in the Philippines for our LG Curved 4K OLED TV, especially for those who have a genuine appreciation for design and top-quality home entertainment. Its seamlessly slim and curved design, and perfect black color quality make the product a true game-changer.

What are your plans in the near future for the Philippines? Should we anticipate new product launches and announcements?
For the remainder of the year, we would like to focus on educating consumers about OLED technology, as it is in a class of its own. Earlier this year, LG has already established the 98-inch ULTRA HD TV and 105-inch Curved Super UHD TV – the largest TVs to ever enter the Philippine market, among other leveled-up products. This world-class lineup has propelled LG to the top-tier status in the industry, and LG once again affirms its TV leadership with OLED, the future of TV technology.



JEFF CASTILLO, COUNTRY MANAGER, FORTINET PHILIPPINES

Describe FortiCloud. How do you think the enhancements to the cloud-based FortiCloud benefits businesses across different industries? How does it work?

FortiCloud is a hosted security management and log retention service for FortiGate, FortiWiFi, and FortiAP devices. It gives you centralized reporting, traffic analysis, configuration management, and log retention without the need for additional hardware and software. One or multiple devices are registered with FortiCloud under a single account. The logs from each device are periodically sent to FortiCloud for storage and processing, and, from it, reports can be generated to indicate trends. Drilldown capability and real-time alerting are also available. FortiCloud also takes copies of the devices' configurations for backup and restore, or to provision new devices. A VPN tunnel can be used to bring up the console of a selected sitting behind a firewall, allowing you to perform configuration or policy changes remotely.

The explosion of BYOD brings unparalleled convenience of accessing data in real-time through mobile means. How does the FortiCloud complement this trend?

FortiCloud gives an additional layer of parameter defense for BYOD, as it provides real-time monitoring and alerts, easy access, and simplified management. It allows centralized control and granular visibility and reporting through an individual's device.

With the upgraded FortiCloud, organizations need not sacrifice data security when managing their enterprise wireless LAN on the cloud. How do you ensure this to your clients, as well as your potential customers?

Fortinet is constantly developing products to counter threats and security breaches so that confidential data is not compromised and financial damages are prevented. FortiCloud has fortified this notion, as it eases the deployment and management of these devices, which increased visibility and control and reduced overall infrastructure complexity.

What makes this cloud solution different from other cloud-based platforms?

FortiCloud gives a 360-degree view of your network, providing a preconfigured and custom report to track security activity and keep security breaches at bay. Through Fortinet's products that are supplemented by FortiCloud, centralized management and uniform control across various devices are enforced.

How does Fortinet address the most common cloud security challenges?

Fortinet provides centrally managed physical and virtual appliances that deliver the broadest range of network security solutions in the industry. Fortinet can help protect your critical data against new vulnerabilities and attacks before they are exploited through continuous end-to-end security.



TAP FOR WEBSITE

DOUBLE THE FUN

LG V10

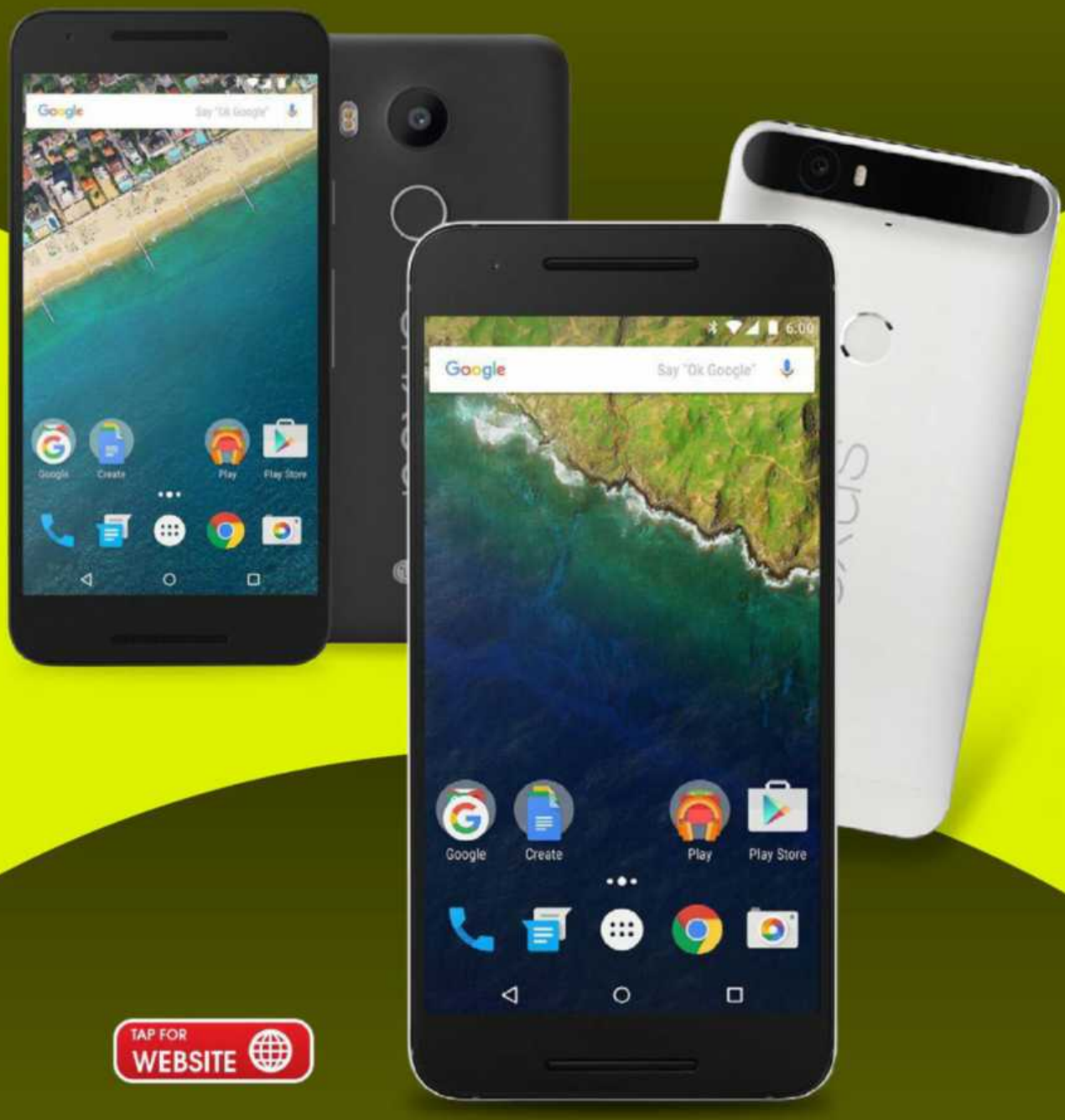
www.lg.com/ph

The LG V10 flaunts remarkable features, such as two separate front displays, dual-front cameras, a manual video mode, and a resilient Dura Guard frame with soft Dura Skin. The 2.1-inch second screen is located right above the 5.7-inch QHD IPS primary display. When the main display is being used, the second screen can be used as a space for app shortcuts. LG also one-ups the competition with two front-facing cameras, consisting of two different lenses for standard 80-degree selfies and perfect wide-angle selfies at 120 degrees.

THE BEST JUST KEEPS GETTING BETTER!

HardwareZone.com.ph





TAP FOR WEBSITE

ULTIMATE ANDROID DUO

Google Nexus 6P and 5X

www.google.com.ph/nexus

Get your pure Android experience from the new Nexus 6P and 5X from Google. Both these Nexus devices come with the best Google apps and run on the latest Android 6.0 Marshmallow OS, working right out of the box. The 6P and 5X are equipped with powerful cameras that catch more light and will let you shoot videos at 4K resolution. Both devices also feature a new way to say hello through the latest Project Fi program that delivers a fast and easy wireless experience, transitioning your calls seamlessly between Wi-Fi and cellular networks.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Microsoft Surface Book

www.microsoft.com/en-ph

The new Surface Book from Microsoft sports Intel's latest Skylake processor and a discrete NVIDIA GPU, providing more power when running GPU-intensive applications. If you intend to do some gaming, this all-around machine is also suitable for you. It runs on Windows 10 Pro, flaunts a 13.5-inch PixelSense display with a resolution of 3000 x 2000 and an aspect ratio of 3:2, and is detachable, doubling up as a tablet to offer users the best of both worlds. It is also equipped with up to 16GB of RAM and up to 1TB of SSD internal storage.





TAP FOR WEBSITE

HIGH-END SIBLINGS

Canon EOS 5DS and 5DS R

www.canon.com.ph

Canon's new EOS 5DS and 5DS R cameras are high-resolution full-frame models that flaunt the same 50.6-megapixel CMOS sensor and photographic capabilities. Both cameras offer remarkable features for photographers who produce large, highly detailed prints. They are very similar to each other; the only difference between the two is that the 5DS has a standard optical low-pass filter, while the 5DS R comes with a low-pass filter cancellation effect that is great for specialized applications where pixel-level sharpness and detail are desired.

PALM-SIZED SHOOTER

Sony Cyber-shot RX1R II

www.sony.com.ph

A professional compact camera that is equipped with a 42.4-megapixel sensor paired with a 35mm f/2 lens, the Sony Cyber-shot RX1R II lets you conveniently shoot high-quality images wherever you go. It flaunts an XGA OLED viewfinder for eye-level shooting, has a new AF-C focus mode with up to 5fps continuous shooting capabilities, and features 399 focal plane phase-detection AF points. It also comes with an advanced BIONZ X image processing engine and a fixed-lens design for you to get the best resolution and enhanced sensitivity.



ACER ASPIRE R14
// US$ 699

The new Acer Aspire R14 has evolved with a new hairline-brush metallic finish and diamond-cut edge design. It's equipped with the latest generation of Intel Core processors with up to 8GB of DDR3L system memory, featuring MU-MIMO wireless technology. **www.acer.com.ph**

TECHNOMARINE CRUISE ORIGINAL BLUE SUN
// PhP 31,500

Take a plunge with Technomarine's Cruise Original Blue Sun stainless steel watch. Flaunting a classic, signature look, this watch is built to accompany you on any land or sea adventure. It also has interchangeable silicone straps for extra variety. **www.technomarine.com**











HAPPY MOBILE ULTRA THIN POWER BANK

The Happy Mobile Ultra Thin Power Bank has a 1700mAH battery capacity that is ideal for emergency use. It can serve as your on-the-go backup power supply, so you never have to worry about missing out on the latest online news. **www.facebook.com/HappyMobilePhilippines**

URBANISTA IBIZA
// PhP 2,599

Wear your music anywhere you go with the Urbanista Ibiza. This pair of in-ear headphones will let you enjoy a club-like music experience. It features a GoFit Silicon wing ergonomic system to fit your active lifestyle and provide you a boosted sound experience. **www.urbanista.com**

MICROSOFT LUMIA 950 XL

The new Lumia 950 XL from Microsoft sports a 5.7-inch QHD display, which is a half an inch bigger than the Lumia 950. It sports a 20-megapixel rear camera with triple-LED flash and an iris scanner that supports Windows Hello biometrics. **www.microsoft.com/en-ph**

D-LINK WIRELESS N300 USB RANGE EXTENDER
// PhP 1,400

Extend your wireless network at home with the DMG-112A Wireless N300 USB Range Extender from D-Link. This compact device will let you have the best possible connection, while supporting the One-Touch app on your iOS or Android device to easily set it up. **www.dlink.com.ph**

LENOVO TAB 2 A7-20
// PhP 3,999

Weighing only 269g, the Lenovo TAB 2 A7-20 is designed for portability. It's great for reading, listening to music, watching videos, and surfing the web while on the go, and is equipped with Dolby-enhanced audio for an immersive entertainment experience. **www.lenovo.com/ph**



LUMEE SMARTPHONE CASE
// PhP 2,900

Change the way you take your selfies and do FaceTime! The Lumee Smartphone Case will light up your face so you can take brighter and clearer selfies. It is also great when you're taking videos using your smartphone's front-facing camera. **www.facebook.com/MacpowerPH**

PIONEER XDJ-700
// US$ 699

The XDJ-700 is Pioneer's most compact, portable, and flexible digital player yet. It has Hot Cues, Auto Loops, Sleep mode, and Beat Sync features, and comes with a 7-inch touchscreen display. It's perfect for even the smallest booth or home setup. **www.pioneerdj.com**

VELOCI PULSE CAMO
// PhP 2,950

The Veloci Pulse Camo has a dual-time display, built-in stopwatch, illuminator, and alarm features. It's also water-resistant up to 100 meters. It flaunts a very functional style so you can easily blend it with whatever outfit you're wearing for the day. **www.veloci.ph**

LAB RESULTS

Every month, behind the doors of our super secret gadget testing facility, the latest tech products are put through their paces using industry-recognized benchmarks and our own blend of real-world usage scenarios. Here are our findings!



THE AWARDS

10	9/9.5	8/8.5	Best Performance	Best Value

Review scores of 8/8.5 are awarded the Silver Award. 9/9.5 get the Gold. ONLY a perfect 10 wins our Platinum Award.

PHILIPPINES HARDWARE ZONE .COM

For more comprehensive takes on the features and performance of the products reviewed here, visit HardwareZone.com.ph.

Sony Xperia Z4 Tablet

LIGHTEST, THINNEST, AND WATERPROOF

After skipping a generation (the Z3 Tablet only came in a compact 8-inch size), Sony is re-introducing its 10-inch flagship tablet in the form of the Z4 Tablet. A direct successor to last year's Z2 Tablet, the Z4 has been upgraded with a QHD display and a Qualcomm Snapdragon 810 octa-core processor.

Sony is once again utilizing its minimalist OmniBalance design, and at first glance, there's really nothing to separate it from the Z2 Tablet. The Z4 Tablet is still one of the best-engineered tablets on the market, and is both ultra-thin at just 6.1mm and ultra-light at a mere 393g.

As with all of Sony's Z gadgets, the Z4 Tablet is waterproof and rated IP68, meaning it's impervious to dust and can survive immersion in water up to 1.5m for 30 minutes. The waterproof build has also evolved and now includes a capless USB port, removing the need for a fiddly port cover flap like on previous Z tablets.

The Z4 Tablet's new QHD 2560 x 1600-pixel resolution display translates to 299 pixels per inch. Clarity on the Z4 Tablet is top-notch. Like its predecessors, the IPS LCD display boasts Sony's Live Color LED and Triluminous display tech, although we found the colors to be a bit too vivid for our liking.

One of the stand-out features on the Z4 Tablet is its front-facing stereo speakers. The volume can be cranked up nice and loud, although it starts to get a bit harsh at maximum volumes. Don't expect a ton of bass, especially from a tablet this thin, but the speakers are still way ahead of other tablet offerings.

In our benchmark testing, it performed well, surpassing the rest of our tablets in both computing and graphics processing. One area where it disappointed, however, was battery life. The Z4 Tablet has the same 6000mAh capacity battery as the older Z2 Tablet. With the addition of both a much higher-resolution display, and a more power-hungry octa-core processor, battery life took a big hit on the Z4 Tablet, and it lasted just over six hours in our video looping benchmark – nearly two hours less than the Z2 Tablet!

The Xperia Z4 Tablet has a new display and a new processor, but it doesn't really feel like a new product. It's still a fantastic device, but it delivers exactly what the Z2 Tablet did last year: great build, waterproof durability, minimalist design, and top-notch display and speakers.

Comparing the two tablets, it's hard to say that Sony has really done much to improve on last year's model, other than bumping up its specs. And while the QHD display and octa-core processor are nice upgrades, when they come with a huge decrease in battery life, you have to consider if the trade-off is really worth it.

by *James Lu*



AT A GLANCE

OS
Android 5.0 Lollipop

Display
10.1-inch IPS LCD (2560 x 1600)

Processor
Qualcomm Snapdragon 810 (Octa-core)

Storage
32GB, expandable up to 128GB via microSD

Price
PhP 42,990



The Sony Xperia Z4 Tablet has been upgraded with a capless micro-USB port.

CONCLUSION

It has a new display and a new processor, but it doesn't really feel like a new product. It's still a fantastic device, but it delivers exactly what the Z2 Tablet did last year.

TESTED & RATED

8.5/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

Ford EcoSport

FOR CITY DRIVING

TAP FOR WEBSITE



AT A GLANCE

Engine
1.5L TiVCT

Transmission
Powershift
6-speed
Automatic

Horsepower
110hp@6300
ps/rpm

Torque
142Nm@4500
ps/rpm

Price
PhP 975,000

SILVER HWM PHILIPPINES



One of the notable features of is its keyless start. You can ignite the engine with just a single push of a button.



Headlights can be turned on and off using this knob, which may need some getting used to for first-time users.



The Ford EcoSport (2015) is a compact sports utility vehicle (SUV) that is designed for city driving. It's relatively easy to drive even on the busy streets of Manila and to maneuver in tight parking spaces. In this review, we were able to take the Ford EcoSport 1.5L Titanium AT for a test drive.

The EcoSport has the look of a 4x4 vehicle, but we do not recommend that you drive it around on any type of road like you would with a full-sized 4x4. It comes with a sporty look and high ground clearance, but it's a bit short in terms of handling, especially on rough roads.

When it comes to the design, the EcoSport's interior has similarities with the Fiesta. Sometimes, it's even referred to as a taller and bigger Fiesta; however, the build quality doesn't feel as sturdy, since most of it is made of plastic. With shiny black plastic covering most of its interior, the inside of the car is highly susceptible to scratches. The car's small sunroof is a nice aesthetic addition, though.

The driver and passenger sitting in front gets a lot of leg and headroom, thanks to the tall ceiling. The driver's seat is extra comfortable, which makes it a delight even when you take it for long drives. Additionally, the armrest on the driver's seat adds a nice ergonomic touch. Unfortunately, passengers at the back may find the seats a bit restrictive, especially for three people at once. The good thing is that the rear seats have head rests that improve the comfort somewhat.

The EcoSport offers more cargo space than what you would get from a Fiesta, notably with its rear seats folded down. It also comes with an Under Passage Seat Storage if you need to load more stuff inside it. However, accessing this space can be tricky. Even if the load bay offers more space, the vehicle comes with a side-hinged hatch that is difficult to open, especially when you're parked close to a wall.

The car offers a high driving position, which results in having a better view of the road ahead. And yet, in exchange for having a high body, it packs more weight. Carrying about 300kg more compared to the Fiesta, it sometimes leans on corners. Luckily, its large side mirrors help in keeping wind noise out of the way.

The car's engine, which is similar to what the Fiesta has, delivered nicely as expected. It performed lively, but the added weight hit its fuel economy as compared to the Fiesta. Although the drive was good most of the time, it struggled to accelerate fast on wide-open roads. Still, it was reasonably zippy when driving in the metro traffic. We would have liked it to be more responsive and to drive us with more power when in Manual Mode.

The steering and damping of the EcoSport were acceptable, to say the very least, but they struggled to keep the pace. It was comfortable at cruise, but it got quite shaky on uneven surfaces even at low speeds. Its 16-inch alloy 205/60 R16 Goodyear Assurance Fuel Max tires and standard traction control don't provide much grip when driving on muddy inclines.

An advantage of the EcoSport is its generous amount of equipment. Even the basic model has alloy wheels, LED lights, and Ford's own multimedia and connectivity system, Ford SYNC. Meanwhile, the top-of-the-line model has half-leather seats, cruise control, and keyless entry. As an option, rear parking sensors can be added to make parking easier.

The Ford EcoSport's pricing is set relatively low. At PhP 975,000, it's an enticing vehicle to invest in. It's no wonder we've been seeing more and more EcoSports driven on the roads of Metro Manila. However, with more compact SUVs entering the Philippine market, like the recently introduced Nissan Juke and Chevrolet Trax, the competition might be stiffer in the future. Ford may need to step it up further in order to take the lead in this segment.

by *Katrina D. Canlas*

CONCLUSION

The Ford EcoSport offers more space and greater flexibility than a regular hatchback, and allows easier driving compared to a full-blown crossover. With more compact crossovers becoming available locally, it's good that the EcoSport arrived a step ahead.

TESTED & RATED

8.5/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

Samsung Galaxy Note 5 & S6 Edge+

THE BEST PHABLETS MONEY CAN BUY

NOTE 5

OS
Android 5.1.1

Display
5.7-inch Super AMOLED (2560 x 1440)

Dimensions
153.2 x 76.1 x 7.6mm

Weight
171g

Price
PhP 36,990



GOLD HWM PHILIPPINES

S6 EDGE+

OS
Android 5.1.1

Display
5.7-inch Super AMOLED (2560 x 1440)

Dimensions
154.4 x 75.8 x 6.9mm

Weight
153g

Price
PhP 39,990



GOLD HWM PHILIPPINES

TAP FOR WEBSITE



Both phablets have a 16MP, optically stabilized rear camera that's great at low-light shooting.



The Note 5's S Pen is the most accurate stylus Samsung has designed to date. It feels great, too.



The new Samsung Galaxy Note 5 and S6 Edge+ are cut from the same cloth as the smaller S6 and S6 Edge that we first saw in March. They all sport Gorilla Glass protecting the front and back, a strengthened metal frame, a 16-megapixel, optically stabilized rear camera and 5-megapixel front camera, a fingerprint-sensing Home button, a heart rate monitor at the flash area that doubles as a shutter button for selfies, support for two wireless charging standards, a super-fast Exynos octa-core processor, speedy UFS 2.0 storage, and LPDDR4 RAM. If you're looking for differences, the Note 5 and S6 Edge+ have a bigger screen (5.7-inch, Quad HD), faster charging rate, and more RAM (4GB).

The Note 5 and S6 Edge+ don't look identical, of course. The former has a flat screen and curved back; the latter a curved screen and flat back. Either way, both phones look great and feel great. The decision to stick with the S6's design also sealed the fates of the removable battery and expandable storage. That said, the 3000mAh battery that both devices are using is no slouch. In our video playback test, the Note 5 lasted 14 hours and 50 minutes, and the S6 Edge+ 15 hours and 10 minutes. These numbers are better than what we've gotten on the Note 4. Also, we've had no problems reaching five hours of screen-on time, with juice to spare at the end of a long day.

Despite the various similarities, the two phablets target very different types of users. It boils down to whether you prefer the Note 5's S Pen, or the S6 Edge+'s sloping display.

New features of the S Pen include Scroll Capture, which lets you screen-capture a long webpage and then annotate it afterwards; PDF writing using both pen and finger; and Screen Off Memo, which lets you start writing on the screen the moment you eject the S Pen. You can also add up to three third-party app shortcuts to the Air Command contextual menu.

On the other hand, the stylus-less S6 Edge+ attempts to win you over with several software tricks designed specifically for the curved display. Like the smaller S6 Edge, there's Information Stream, which displays information like weather, time, and notifications on the curved edges; and People Edge, which gives you a row of five colored contacts who you can quickly call, text, or send emails to. Being able to see who's calling when the phone is face-down on the table based on the color that peeps out from the curved sides, and then rejecting the call and sending a quick reply with a touch on the heart rate sensor, continues to be our favorite dinner table trick.

Performance-wise, the phablets aced most of our benchmark tests. Their JavaScript performance (around 350ms) in SunSpider is every bit as good as the iPhone's; and in the GPU department, their 3DMark Ice Storm Unlimited scores (in the region of 25,000) are class-leading. Synthetic benchmarks aside, in the real world, both phablets ran all sorts of tasks without any hiccups, and responded very quickly to touches. That said, RAM usage can do with a bit more optimization, so that apps or data (e.g., Chrome tabs) don't need to reload so often.

The Camera app's Pro mode now lets you save photos as RAW files and manually adjust the shutter speed between 1/24000 and 10 seconds. Videos should also appear less shaky due to improved software-based video stabilization. Add all these to the fast startup (just double-press the Home button), high sensitivity, and class-leading image quality, and you've two of the best Android camera phones in the market.

Between the two phablets, we'd go for the Note 5 for its better value. Despite packing a stylus, it's PhP 3,000 cheaper than the S6 Edge+. It's also slightly more comfortable to hold due to its curved back. But that's not to say the S6 Edge+ is inferior. Even without a stylus, its design, features, and performance are still head and shoulders above most of its competitors. Sure, there are new phablets these days that are ticking more spec checkboxes than recent Samsung devices and cost quite a bit less; but in general, we still find Samsung flagships better built and have fewer edge cases to deal with.

by *Ng Chong Seng*

CONCLUSION

Both are excellent performers, but the Galaxy Note 5 offers better, more practical value, as it's cheaper and has the S Pen. It's also slightly more comfortable to hold due to its curved back.

Samsung Galaxy Note 5

9.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+

9.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES



ASUS ZenFone Selfie

READY TO TAKE A SELFIE?

The trend for selfie-centric smartphones began sometime last year with front-facing cameras being bumped up with more features and megapixels. What unique features does the ASUS ZenFone Selfie bring to the table? A pair of 13-megapixel camera sensors on the front and back of the device, coupled with ASUS' PixelMaster technology!

In terms of design, the ZenFone Selfie does not deviate much from the current category-leading ZenFone 2 series. The ergonomically curved back provides a natural grip for a phone of this size. One notable difference between the ZenFone Selfie and the rest of the ZenFone 2 series is the fact that the battery can be removed. Besides the option of swapping out a faulty battery, it also gives you access to the microSD and micro-SIM card slots.

The ZenFone Selfie comes with a 5.5-inch Full HD (403ppi) IPS LCD display reinforced with Gorilla Glass 4. It features full-screen lamination, where the cover glass and touch panel layers are fused together to eliminate the air gap. The end result gives you an impression that text and images are floating just beneath the display.

Unlike the ZenFone 2's Intel Atom Z3580 processor, the ZenFone Selfie is powered by a Qualcomm Snapdragon 615 octa-core processor and 3GB of RAM. The ZenFone Selfie is on par with phones of its class, but was left biting the dust by the Intel-powered ZenFone 2. This just means that while the phone is capable of playing most mainstream games, some of the demanding titles may not play as smoothly as the ZenFone 2 counterpart.

As a selfie-centric phone, it is only natural that ASUS crams the best imaging technologies in the ZenFone Selfie. ASUS continues to throw everything but the kitchen sink in its phones. For consumers who love to play around with different camera modes, this could come in handy. The image quality is good for a 13-megapixel shooter; sufficient details are captured with good color balance. The macro focusing is great, although it takes slightly more than a second to get the subject focused.

In our standard video battery test, the ZenFone Selfie lasted quite long with an uptime of 9 hours and 35 minutes. The battery longevity is attributed to its low power consumption.

While it retains the basic DNA of the ZenFone 2, the ZenFone Selfie does come with some differentiating features, such as the 13-megapixel front-facing camera, removable battery, and Snapdragon 615 processor. If mobile gaming is the most important factor to you, get the ASUS ZenFone 2; otherwise, the ZenFone Selfie is as good, if not better, in all other areas, especially battery life.

by *Cookie Monster*

AT A GLANCE

OS
Android 5.0 Lollipop

Display
5.5-inch IPS LCD (1920 x 1080)

Processor
Qualcomm Snapdragon 615 (Octa-core)

Storage
32GB, expandable up to 128GB via microSD

Price
PhP 11,995



A phone of its size should have the power button located on the side for easier access.

CONCLUSION

If mobile gaming is the most important factor to you, get the ASUS ZenFone 2; otherwise, the ZenFone Selfie is as good, if not better, in all other areas, especially battery life.

TESTED & RATED

8.5/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

Canon PowerShot SX710 HS

SHOOT ANYTHING

When we set out to travel, we want to travel light, although sometimes it's quite hard to achieve due to the heavy camera equipment we usually end up bringing. So when we got the Canon PowerShot SX710 HS in our hands, we knew that we finally got the perfect solution to our baggage dilemmas.

Sporting a fixed 3-inch, 922k-dot TFT LCD display, the SX710 HS is a great addition to Canon's travel-zoom camera range. It flaunts a slim body structure with a pronounced rubberized strip on the front that lets you effortlessly hold the camera without slipping. It is pretty small with dimensions of 112.7 x 65.8 x 34.8mm, so you can easily fit it into your pocket or handbag.

The SX710 HS is already equipped with the latest camera technology that will let you capture big moments while on the go, so you no longer have to bring your heavy camera equipment and accessories. This means you can save a lot of space in your suitcase. The controls are easy to use, which is great, especially when you want to take snapshots of things and events while you're traveling.

Managing to impress us is its 20.3-megapixel, 1/2.3-inch CMOS sensor with a DIGIC 6 image processor. It has a manual mode, which is good, considering it's a point-and-shoot camera. It also has improved Dynamic IS and maximum ISO sensitivity of up to 3200. We were able to capture splendid shots in the morning at ISO 100. Beginning ISO 800, however, we encountered over-smoothening of images.

Thanks to its built-in 30x zoom lens with a 35mm-equivalent focal reach of 25 to 70mm and an aperture range of f/3.2 to f/6.9, we managed to shoot from far distances. There's also a digital zoom that reaches up to 60x. We had decent shots even at extreme focal lengths and in low-light environments, although there was obvious noise and loss of detail, particularly with a higher ISO level like ISO 1250.

On the left side of the body is a pop-up flash that can be manually opened through a small switch. There was a slight letdown, however, when we took shots using its built-in flash. When we took pictures in auto mode with a flash, we had to wait for a while before we were able take another shot, which is quite unusual. We sometimes missed out on successive scenes because of the delay.

Still, the Canon PowerShot SX710 HS succeeded to impress us. It is capable of shooting Full HD videos at 60fps, and has both Wi-Fi and NFC connectivity. And, although Canon's latest compact offering is incapable of shooting raw files, we consider it a truly capable point-and-shoot camera with an ability to zoom in on the smallest of subjects even from a great distance.

by *Ashley Lucas*



AT A GLANCE

Resolution
20.3MP

Sensor
1/2.3-inch CMOS

Lens
25 - 750mm

Aperture Range
f/3.2 - f/6.9

Price
PhP 17,998



On the left side of the body is a pop-up flash that you can manually open through a small switch.

CONCLUSION

The Canon PowerShot SX710 HS is an awesome travel companion and a truly capable point-and-shoot camera with an ability to zoom in on the smallest of subjects.

TESTED & RATED

8.5/10

HWM PHILIPPINES



NIKON D5500

SMALL AND NIMBLE

AT A GLANCE

Mount
Nikon F

Sensor
APS-C CMOS

Resolution
24.2MP

Display
3.2-inch Touchscreen LCD

Price
PhP 42,900
(w/ 18-55mm kit lens)



The Nikon D5500 features a deep hand grip and ergonomic settings wheel for improved handling.

As the successor to the D5300, the Nikon D5500 basically takes the articulating LCD screen and Wi-Fi capabilities of the previous model, and adds the element of touch control, while cramming it all into a smaller and lighter body. Also, there's now an eye sensor to automatically shut off the LCD screen when your eye is at the viewfinder, thus helping to conserve energy.

Like the D750 before it, the D5500 comes without an anti-aliasing (AA) filter and uses Nikon's new monocoque design, which implements a carbon fiber outer body shell for incredible weight savings without compromising on strength. The D5500's 24.2MP DX-format APS-C-sized sensor also comes without an optical low-pass filter (OLPF) for maximum sharpness, and its native ISO settings are now rated up to ISO 25600.

We were pleasantly surprised at how well the camera fit in our hands, and that is in large due to the depth afforded to the hand grip. Small cameras tend to be a little harder to operate as the buttons are too small and too closely packed together, but we didn't experience that with the D5500, as the mix of functions assigned to physical buttons and those accessed via menu diving seemed to be just about right. Of course, having the same menus accessible by touch makes a world of difference in terms of making changes quickly and easily via on-screen menus.

Images at taken up ISO 6400 sensitivity were very clean, and we must say that they stand up well against the likes of the Canon EOS 7D Mark II and the Samsung NX1. There's plenty of detail, and noise is extremely well controlled with almost no color noise to speak of at all.

Though the camera uses the same Multi-CAM 4800DX autofocus module from the D5300 (which has 39 TTL phase-detection points, of which 9 are cross-type) focusing is generally fast and accurate, and the autofocus points give you enough coverage over the frame. Where it does suffer is when doing continuous autofocus with live-view activated. That's when the camera tends to hunt a little, so we'd recommend shooting through the viewfinder if you're trying to capture sport.

The D5500's five frames per second continuous shooting rate isn't necessarily slow by any means, but when we tried it in the field for ourselves, it just didn't quite seem to be fast enough to catch the action; that's perhaps the only knock we have on this camera.

Honestly speaking, we think the D5500 makes a great secondary camera for people who already have a set of Nikon lenses and would like a compact option to bring for everyday use, or for those who need to cover events and want two lightweight bodies with which to mount an assortment of lenses on.

by *Marcus Wong*

CONCLUSION

We think the D5500 makes a great secondary camera for people who already have a set of Nikon lenses and would like a compact option to bring for everyday use.

TESTED & RATED

8.5/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

Elecom LBT-OH100

WIRELESS OVERHEAD CUPS

For some time now, wireless headphones have been becoming increasingly popular. Still, it is tough to find one that does not only give a nice listening experience, but also comes with a cool appeal that wired headphones fail to provide. In this review, we take a look at the Elecom LBT-OH100 Bluetooth headphones.

Although these Elecom headphones do not offer the same cool factor as Beats, it comes with a design that exudes a certain degree of audio sophistication. It may miss the street appeal, but it hits the right note when it comes to serving its purpose for mobile usage. The 3D fit structure of its cups have high regard for ergonomics that disperses lateral pressure for a comfortable fit. This also reduces sound leakage to enjoy rich sound with minimal external noise.

Build quality feels good, although we feel it would be better if it had more metal than plastic. Furthermore, the plastic headband tends to peel off after some time of use. Additionally, its curved triangular ears need some getting used to, since we are more familiar with circular ones. It is good to know that it adopts the 40mm diameter driver, which makes sound quality more immersive. The drivers on headphones are engineered well to deliver balanced sound reproduction.

It is comfortable to wear, thanks to its light body, properly padded headband, and cushioned earpads. We encountered no problem wearing the headphones for extended hours. Pairing with the headphones is made easier via Bluetooth and NFC. It is as simple as placing your smartphone on the headphones, and then you are off to listening to your favorite tunes.

The audio quality on the Elecom LBT-OH100 headphones is a pleasant surprise. For the untrained ear, there is a minimal and unnoticeable difference between the wired and wireless setups on these headphones. Usually, Bluetooth headphones suffer flat sound and a lack of deep bass, but not with this one. It delivered decent bass performance while keeping a clear and crisp sound across the spectrum.

Battery life is quite good on these headphones. We were able to use it for a day on a single charge. Should you run out of battery and have no time to recharge, it comes with a 3.5mm audio cable to make it work like a regular pair of wired headphones. Both the charging port and the headset jack are located on the right ear; the volume rocker and power button can be found on the same ear, as well.

The Elecom LBT-OH100 may not have great street style, but that's okay with us, since it delivers convenient mobile use and good sound performance while on the go.

by *Katrina D. Canlas*



AT A GLANCE

Type
Overhead Bluetooth Headphones

Driver Unit
Full-range 40mm

Frequency
2.4GHz

Battery
Rechargeable Lithium Polymer

Price
PhP 7,350



The volume rocker is located on the right ear so you can directly adjust the volume on the headphones.

CONCLUSION

The Elecom LBT-OH100 may not have great street style, but that's okay with us, since it delivers convenient mobile use and good sound performance while on the go.

TESTED & RATED

8.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

WD My Passport Ultra

SIMPLE AND SECURE

TAP FOR WEBSITE



WD has provided a fresh look and larger storage capacities with their new iteration of the WD My Passport Ultra. It's got more colors to choose from and is available in four capacities: 500GB, 1TB, 2TB, and 3TB. With this review, we will be taking a closer look at their 2TB offering.

Externally, WD has moved on from the vented plate of the previous My Passport Ultra to a sleek and glossy finish. The coating makes it more prone to fingerprints, but it does make it look more modern and minimalist.

The drive comes with an 18-inch flat USB 3.0 for connectivity. WD has also given users access to its WD Security app that you would need to obtain from their website. The security app uses built-in 256-bit AES hardware-based encryption to protect your files from unwanted access. Aside from the security app, you can also use WD's backup software, which gives you the option to back up your files directly to the drive or to a Dropbox account.

We connected it to a motherboard that has a USB 3.1 Type-A port to test the performance of the drive. We ran CrystalDiskMark to measure its read and write speed. The My Passport Ultra got 117.7 MB/s in sequential write and 116.4 MB/s in sequential read, while it garnered a score of 0.415 in random 4KiB read and 0.258 in random 4KiB write.

WD has delivered a fantastic storage solution that is easy to use, comes with several extras in terms of software, and comes in several attractive colors and capacities to suit your budget and lifestyle.

If you are looking for a portable external drive that is amazingly simple to use and assures you that your personal files are encrypted and secure, then the WD My Passport Ultra is a great choice.

by *Chester Labaco*

TESTED & RATED

8.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

AT A GLANCE

Capacity
500GB, 1TB, 2TB, 3TB

Connectivity
USB 3.0

Colors
Classic Black, Wild Berry, Noble Blue, Brillian White

Price
From PhP 3,390

S-Digital Nuke

BLOW THE ROOF OFF



Formed like a large capsule, the S-Digital Nuke will make any room tremble. Judging by the look itself, it appears like it can easily blow the roof off. Thanks to its twin full-range drivers with extra bass, the Nuke really does have what it takes to be called a sound blaster.

We put the Nuke to the test by playing various tracks, ranging from slow tunes to club music, and adjusting the bass and treble from the lowest to highest. At a maximum volume level of 30, the Nuke succeeded in producing really loud music with minimal distortion, and managed to produce clear audio with powerful bass. When the volume level was lowered down to half with slow music playing, though, we heard some distortion, barely hearing some of the lyrics from the song. We also didn't notice any difference when we were adjusting the bass control, although the treble adjustment actually worked well for us.

The Nuke has several buttons and functions located at the middle of the capsule-looking sound blaster, including a multi-function display, power button, FM radio tuner, play and pause button, USB port, SD card slot, mic port, and three knobs for bass, treble, and volume control. There are also buttons where you can choose different modes and select music from memory and folders. At the back are two 3.5mm inputs, a full USB port for charging mobile devices, and the main charging port. The Nuke also has Bluetooth functionality for easy audio streaming.

We like the S-Digital Nuke for having various connectivity options, particularly the microphone functionality, which somehow brought us back to the time when karaoke was in full swing. Overall, the Nuke exhibited great potential when it came to treating music lovers to an overwhelming music listening experience.

by *Ashley Lucas*

TESTED & RATED

8.5/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

AT A GLANCE

Type
Bluetooth Speaker

Radio Frequency
FM 87.5MHz - 108MHz

Connectivity
Bluetooth, 2x USB, 2x 3.5mm AUX input, 1x mic input, 1x SD card

Price
Inquire

S-Digital Splash

A JUMP FROM THE PAST

Go back 20 years in the past, and you'll most likely witness a totally different music era. Before Bluetooth and waterproof speakers, there were the old boomboxes. When we first saw the S-Digital Splash, it was like we were being transported back to the time when our parents and grandparents would put a cassette tape on or tune in to their favorite radio station, while we danced and sang along.

We felt like the Splash is reminiscent of the boombox from our past with two speakers (3.5 inches each) on both sides and a carrying handle on top. It was quite heavy, but the good news is that unlike the past boomboxes, its exterior is now waterproof with an iPX4 rating.

You can still receive radio stations with its PLL Auto Tuner, and, although minimal, you can adjust the treble and bass to your liking. Instead of playing music through tapes and CDs, however, you can now play music from your device by simply pairing it through its Bluetooth functionality. It has no NFC, though, but you can connect it to other devices through its USB port or play music directly from an MP3 device. There is also a multi-function display that shows the frequency and all its other functionalities.

The Splash not only serves as a modern outdoor boombox, but also functions as a powerbank with a 4000mAh battery capacity, which is enough to fully charge a mobile device. We tried the FM radio feature, and with the help of its built-in antenna, we got to tune in to our favorite radio stations without any issues. In terms of audio quality, the Splash was able to satisfy us, although there was an obvious struggle producing sound at loud volumes.

The S-Digital Splash may not be the most lightweight and loudest speaker out there, but it definitely has the chops to play great music.

by *Ashley Lucas*

TESTED & RATED

8.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES



AT A GLANCE

Type
Bluetooth Speaker

Radio Frequency
FM 87.5MHz - 108MHz

Connectivity
Bluetooth, 1x USB,
1x micro-USB,
1x 3.5mm AUX input

Price
Inquire

S-Digital Icon

BREAK THAT BOOMBOX OUT

We got another digital boombox in our lab in the form of the S-Digital Icon. It's quite the boxy type, and compared to the Splash, which has a rubberized exterior, this one has a smooth, shiny coating and a heavier body. It almost looks like a small suitcase. To some extent, like in terms of aesthetics, we prefer the Splash, although after looking at the Icon more closely, we were surprised as to how much it actually has to offer.

Like with the Splash, the Icon lets you adjust the bass and treble. It also has an FM radio auto tuner, two full USB ports (one for MP3 playback and another one for charging), a 3.5mm AUX input, Bluetooth functionality, and a multi-function display that shows its controls, including a 4-band Graphic Spectrum Analyzer. It has two 4-inch high-definition speakers on both sides, and, harking back to the design of the old boomboxes, shows off a volume control knob that you can rotate clockwise or counterclockwise. On top of that, it has a cradle slot for placing your tablet or smartphone.

For a more exciting music experience, S-Digital equipped the Icon with a LED light show system with four modes, including Follow Music, Strobe, Full-On, and Dim. We would have wanted the light show to display more colors, but we were only granted with red. Still, we were delighted with the Follow Music mode, as it synchronized the lights with the beat of the specific music we played.

There was a time when the boombox went from small to big, until it became bigger, louder, and heavier. The Icon has a volume control that can reach up to really high levels, double the volume capacity of the Splash, making it a more suitable match if you want to have a truly modern boombox that can blast really loud music.

by *Ashley Lucas*

TESTED & RATED

8.5/10

HWM PHILIPPINES



AT A GLANCE

Type
Bluetooth Speaker

Radio Frequency
FM 87.5MHz - 108MHz

Connectivity
Bluetooth, 2x USB,
1x 3.5mm AUX input

Price
Inquire



Philips Brilliance 272P

FULL-FEATURED AND ENERGY-EFFICIENT

It was only last September when our review section was graced by the Philips Curved UltraWide LCD display (BDM3490UC). Its 34-inch size felt a little overwhelming at times, but the space it covered brushed off the need for two separate monitors, eliminating any unsightly bezels in between. What we're checking out now is the Philips Brilliance 272P, which isn't as out of this world as the previous monitor we covered, yet still houses several high-end features from Philips.

Judging by the highly adjustable 27-inch PLS panel and 2560 x 1440-pixel resolution, you can tell right off the bat that the 272P is meant for professionals. Adjusting the height and orientation was seamless, but the sheer size of the panel saw it rub against the base at certain angles. We spent most of our time testing it while on its portrait position, which made going through PDF files and editing vertical layouts in Adobe InDesign a pleasure.

One of the 272P's strong points is its assortment of I/O ports, consisting of HDMI, DisplayPort, and DVI connections for the visuals, a single audio port, plus a total of four USB 3.0 ports. The USB type-B jack needs to be plugged into your computer for the three standard USB type-A jacks to work and act as a hub for your peripherals. Daisy-chaining to other monitors can also be done using one of the DisplayPorts.

The features don't stop there; you're also treated to Philips' PowerSensor technology which detects your presence and turns the display off accordingly to save energy, a MultiView function for multiple visual inputs at once, a 2-megapixel webcam with microphone that's good enough for video chats, and a pair of built-in speakers in case you don't have anything else on hand.

We subjected the 272P to a variety of real-world tests to see how well it fares in different scenarios. In all instances, the Quad HD resolution really took over the experience and provided remarkable levels of detail in several applications, especially in image editing and gaming. Out of the box, the colors and brightness didn't match our expectations, but after some tweaking, we were able to achieve the level we initially hoped for. On the bright side, the 6ms response time was consistent all throughout the movies and games we played. It also helped that the IPS technology allows viewing angles reaching 178 degrees.

Our time spent with the Philips Brilliance 272P was an enjoyable one, and we found few flaws that hindered the overall experience. The price of the Philips monitor may seem steep for a plain-looking QHD monitor, but the abundance of features and connectivity options more than make up for it.

by *Marvin R. Velasco*

AT A GLANCE

Display Type
27-inch PLS

Resolution
2560 x 1440

Aspect Ratio
16:9

Refresh Rate
60Hz

Price
PhP 20,400



Connecting your computer to the USB type-B port turns the monitor into a USB 3.0 hub.

CONCLUSION

The price of the Philips monitor may seem steep for a plain-looking QHD monitor, but the abundance of features and connectivity options more than make up for it.

TESTED & RATED

9.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

Gigabyte Z170X Gaming 7

UNCHAIN YOUR GAMING SIDE

The Gigabyte Z170X-Gaming 7 motherboard is based on Intel's Z170 chipset and is part of Gigabyte's G1 gaming motherboards.

The board is visually stunning, sporting a black-and-white color scheme with red accents. It features LED lighting on the I/O panel and on the board itself. You can control the lighting with the included software.

The CPU socket area is free of any large obstructions, allowing you to fit large CPU coolers without any problems. It is outfitted with four DDR4 sockets that can support up to 64GB of RAM. All PCIe slots of the board conform to PCIe 3.0 standards. It has three x1 PCIe slots and three x16 PCIe slots. Gigabyte has also outfitted steel reinforcements to all 16-lane PCIe slots to prevent bigger and heavier GPUs from bending the PCIe slot.

You have access to eight SATA GB/s, six of which are integrated to three SATA Express ports. You also get two M.2 Socket 3 Type-M connectors on the board.

The I/O panel is packed full of connectivity options. You get one PS/2 mouse and keyboard combination port, one HDMI, one DisplayPort, one USB 3.1 Type-C, one USB 3.1 Type-A, five USB 3.0/2.0 ports, one S/PDIF out, five gold-plated audio jacks, and two RJ-45 ports.

Gigabyte has included its EasyTune software with most of its boards, and the Z170X-Gaming 7 is no exception. EasyTune gives you several presets for overclocking. For advanced users, you can manually adjust the frequency of the CPU either through the multiplier tuning or the BCLK. Multiple voltage options are available, as well as several XMP profiles and advanced memory frequency tuning.

In terms of audio, you get a USB DAC-UP to provide an isolated power source to your DAC to minimize electrical interference. You also get a gain boost switch at the bottom of the board, where you can switch from 2.5x or 6x gain, depending on your audio solution.

To know how the Gigabyte Z170X-Gaming 7 would perform, we supplied it with an Intel i7-6700K, GeForce GTX 960, Corsair Dominator Platinum 16GB 2666MHz, and an ADATA SP920SS 256GB SSD.

We ran Cinebench R15 first, where it got a score of 915 in the CPU test and 123.16fps with the OpenGL test. On PCMark 8, it was able to get a score of 4812 on Home Conventional, 5153 on Creative Conventional, and 4083 on Work Conventional. Lastly, we tested it with 3DMark Fire Strike, and it got a score of 6890.

If you're thinking of building a Skylake-based rig, the Gigabyte Z170X-Gaming 7 should be one of your top options. It has plenty of gaming and overclocking accoutrements, while still retaining an affordable price.

by *Chester Labaco*



TAP FOR WEBSITE

AT A GLANCE

Socket
Intel LGA 1151

Memory Slots
4x DIMM, up to 64GB DDR4

Expansion Slots
3x PCIe 3.0 x16,
3x PCIe x1

Storage Options
2x SATA Express,
2x M.2 x4 Socket 3 Type M, 8x SATA 6GB/s

Price
PhP 12,499



All 16-lane PCIe slots are reinforced to prevent beefy GPUs from bending or breaking the slots.

CONCLUSION

The Gigabyte Z170X-Gaming 7 has plenty of gaming and overclocking accoutrements available to the user, while still retaining an affordable price as compared to the competition.

TESTED & RATED

9.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES



TAP FOR WEBSITE

ASUS ROG Maximus VIII Hero

FULL UEFI CONTROL

Following the release of Intel's sixth-generation processors, ASUS has also unleashed its new range of motherboards based on the LGA 1151 socket and Z170 chipset. We will be taking a look at one of its latest offerings: the ASUS ROG Maximus VIII Hero.

The board wears the ROG brand on its sleeve. The black-and-red color motif is classy and pleasing to the eyes. The ROG logo on the board features RGB lighting, so you can customize the color of the lighting based on your rig.

The I/O panel features four USB 2.0 ports, a combination of PS/2 ports for keyboards and mice, a BIOS Flashback button, one DisplayPort 1.2, one HDMI 1.4b, one USB 3.1 Type-A, one USB 3.1 Type-C, two USB 3.0, a RJ-45 1GBit NIC port, S/PDIF out, and gold-played audio jacks.

Located at the top are the LGA 1151 socket for your Skylake CPU and four DDR4 DIMM slots that support up to 64GB of RAM. All PCIe slots are PCIe 3.0. The two gray 16-lane PCIE-slots can run at x16 with a single card. If you are going to SLI/Crossfire your GPUs, the aforementioned slots would run at x8 each. Three x1 PCIe are also available. The bottom black 16-lane PCIe slot only runs at x4, and would disable the second and third x1 PCIe slots if used.

For storage, you have access to a single x4 M.2 port and eight SATA 6GB/s (four of which are shared with two SATA Express ports).

The UEFI is littered with options. The interface of the UEFI is incredibly intuitive for both basic tweaking and advanced overclocking. Aside from overclocking options, ASUS has improved on its fan control options. They have made all fan headers PWM and Voltage mode-capable, giving you more control on how fast your fans would spin and how slow or fast the fans would ramp up or throttle, depending on your load. The board comes with SupremeFX 2015 to ensure that audio quality is superb and a dedicated DAC.

To measure the performance of the board, we equipped it with an Intel Core i7-6700K, GeForce GTX 960, Corsair Dominator Platinum 16GB 2666MHz, and ADATA SP920SS 256GB SSD.

We ran Cinebench R15 and it scored 951 in the CPU test and 125.95fps in the OpenGL test. We also tested it with PCMark 8. It scored 4748 in Home Conventional, 4124 in Work Conventional, and 5259 in Creative Conventional. Lastly, we ran Fire Strike, in which it got a score of 6914.

ASUS made sure that the Maximus VIII Hero will deliver performance to all walks of life – good overclocking options, an impressive audio solution, and intuitive UEFI and fan controls. If you are looking for a relatively high-end motherboard, the ASUS ROG Maximus VIII Hero will not disappoint.

by *Chester Labaco*

AT A GLANCE

Socket
Intel LGA 1151

Memory Slots
4x DIMM, up to 64GB DDR4

Expansion Slots
3x PCIe 3.0 x16,
4x PCIe x1

Storage Options
2x SATA Express,
1x M.2 x4 Socket 3 Type M, 8x SATA 6Gbps

Price
PhP 15,460



The ROG logo on the board features full RGB lighting, so you can tailor its lighting color based on your rig.

CONCLUSION

The ASUS ROG Maximus VIII Hero features impressive UEFI controls and a splendid audio solution. If you are looking for a high-end motherboard, it will not disappoint.

TESTED & RATED

9.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

Sapphire Nitro R7 370

PITCAIRN REFUSES TO RETIRE

Three years ago, AMD released its Pitcairn architecture. One of the first cards that housed Pitcairn was the Radeon HD 7800 series cards. On October 2013, AMD rebranded the Pitcairn architecture under the codename Curacao, which was fused with the Radeon R7 270 and R9 270X. After several years of service, Pitcairn refuses to retire and has been rebranded under the moniker Trinidad.

Despite being based on the aging Pitcairn architecture, the R7 370 supports new features, such as Asynchronous Shaders, Virtual Super Resolution (VSR), and Frame Rate Target Control (FRTC).

The Sapphire Nitro Radeon R7 370 4GB is overcloked out of the box to 985MHz from the default clock of the reference card of 975MHz. Unfortunately, AMD's High Bandwidth Memory (HBM) is not coming to the 300 series of cards. However, the R7 370 does have 4GB of GDDR5 memory, a 256-bit memory bus, and a memory clock of 5600MHz for a total memory bandwidth of 179.2GB/s

The card measures 211.12mm long and sports a dual-slot design which would fit in most micro-ATX and mini-ITX cases. It comes with dual-fans that do not spin when the card is idle or doing light workloads. The fans, along with Sapphire's die-cast heat sink, do their job of cooling the card without any noticeable noise.

The card is powered by a single 6-pin PCIe connector located at the front of the card. At the back is the standard selection of outputs: a DVI-D, DVI-I, HDMI, and DisplayPort.

Our test bench consisted of the following: Intel Core i7-4960X, Gigabyte X79-UD7, ADATA SP920SS 256GB SSD, 8GB 1866MHz DDR3, and Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit SP1.

We ran Futuremark 3DMark and Unigine Heaven Benchmark 4.0 for synthetic benchmarks. For real-world benchmarks, we ran *Tomb Raider (2013)* and *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*.

On 3DMark, the Sapphire Nitro R7 370 got a score of 4851 on Fire Strike, 2332 on Fire Strike Extreme, and 1230 on Fire Strike Ultra. On Unigine Heaven 4.0 with DX11, 1080p, and Ultra Quality with Tesselation turned up to extreme, the card got a minimum FPS of 14.4 and a maximum FPS of 49.8.

With *Tomb Raider (2013)*, the settings were turned up to the Ultimate setting on 1080p. We got a minimum FPS of 24 and a maximum of 44 FPS. Next up is *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*. We turned up the settings to Ultra at 1080p with the HD Pack Installed. We were able to achieve a minimum FPS of 14.4 and a maximum of 49.8fps.

It seems that Pitcairn has aged gracefully through the years. If you are on a budget, the Sapphire Nitro R7 370 is one of the better cards currently available in the market.

by *Chester Labaco*



AT A GLANCE

Stream Processing Units
1024

Core Clock
985Mhz

Memory
4GB GDDR5

Memory Clock
5600MHz

Price
PhP 9,240



The dual-fan design ensures that the card runs cooler than the competition with more headroom.

CONCLUSION

It seems that Pitcairn has aged gracefully through the years. If you are on a budget, the Sapphire Nitro R7 370 is one of the better cards currently available in the market.

TESTED & RATED

8.0/10

HWM PHILIPPINES

KING EAGLE

If there's one basketball player who could do it all, it's the Ateneo Blue Eagle's Kiefer Ravena! Read on as he runs us through his passion for all things basketball and Suzuki.





PHOTOS **SUZUKI PHILIPPINES**







You've been Suzuki's brand ambassador for more than two years now. How has it been so far? How has it helped your career?
It's been a great ride – literally! Having my Swift, our APV, and Grand Vitara, it's one of those endorsements that I always look forward to whenever we have shoots, mall shows, and Auto Festivals. I really enjoy every time when I'm with my Suzuki Family.

What is the most exciting thing about being Suzuki's brand ambassador?
The most exciting part of being part of Suzuki is just being around the people working behind the scenes. A lot of stories shared and memories are built every time we work. It is really a way of life for me representing the Suzuki Brand.

Suzuki has launched and upgraded a number of car models in the past year or so. What can you say about your Grand Vitara Special Edition?
I was surprised with my Grand Vitara. I expected that it would be nice, but when I got it first hand, it was even more than what I expected. You really get your money's worth.

In the past and even now, we've noticed that you seem to have the urge to take full responsibility whenever your team loses. Is it an automatic thing that you do? What is the reason behind it?
It's not the urge of taking full responsibility, it's just that I hate losing. Every time I lose, I know I could do better.

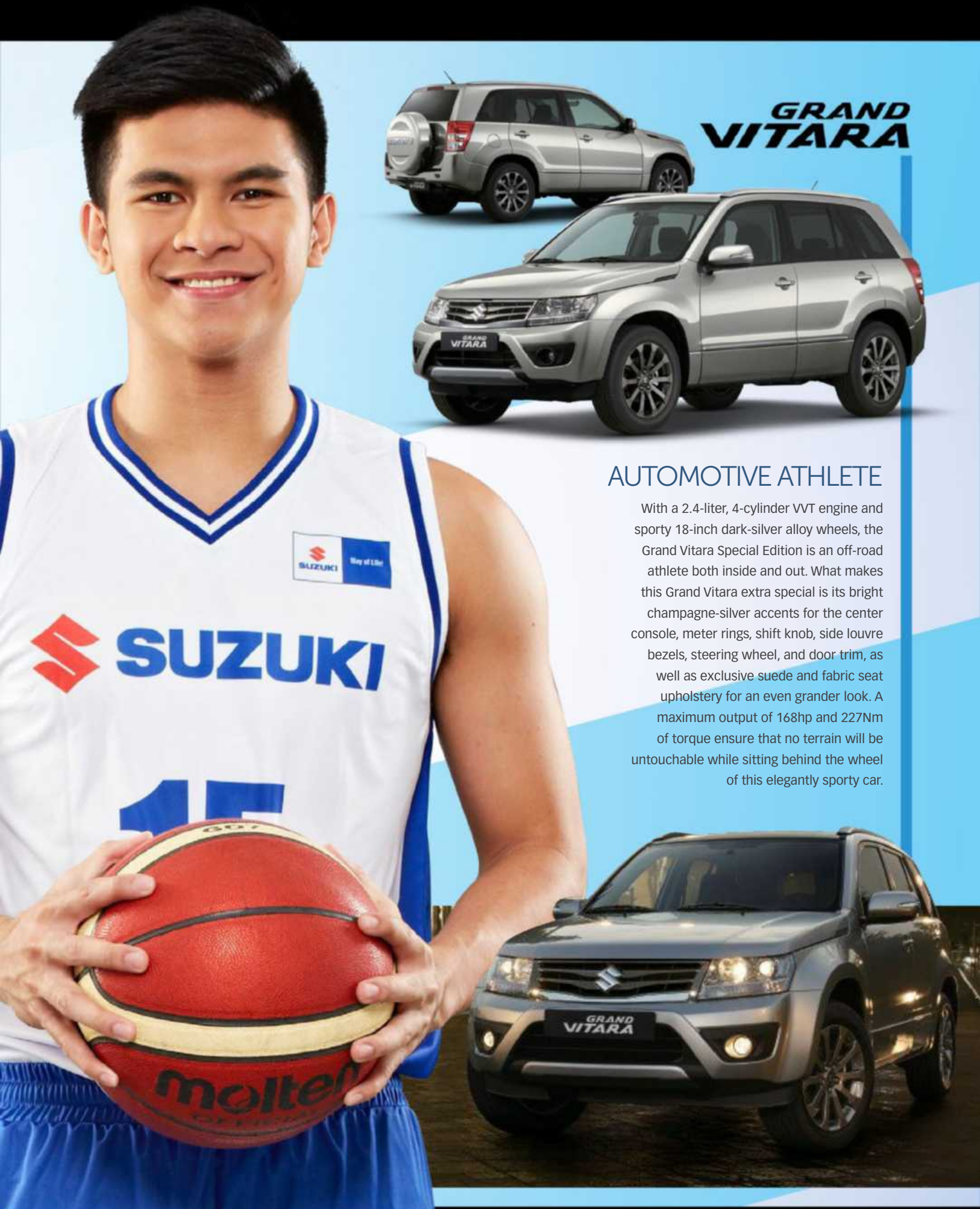
Now that it's your fifth and final year playing for the Ateneo Blue Eagles, how do you want to be remembered by your fans and peers?
I want to be remembered as a winner. I just want to be known as that player who always gives his best in every game.

You've said in your past interviews that you're open to the idea of joining the national team. Has this always been your dream?
It's always been my dream to serve the national team. If I get the chance to play for the country, I would do so. There's this different feeling every time you play for your country.

Many look up to you and consider you as an excellent basketball player. Is there anything else apart from basketball that you want to excel at in the future?
Well, I want to start up my own business. I want to have something to fall back on once my career is done. I also want to be stable in the future.

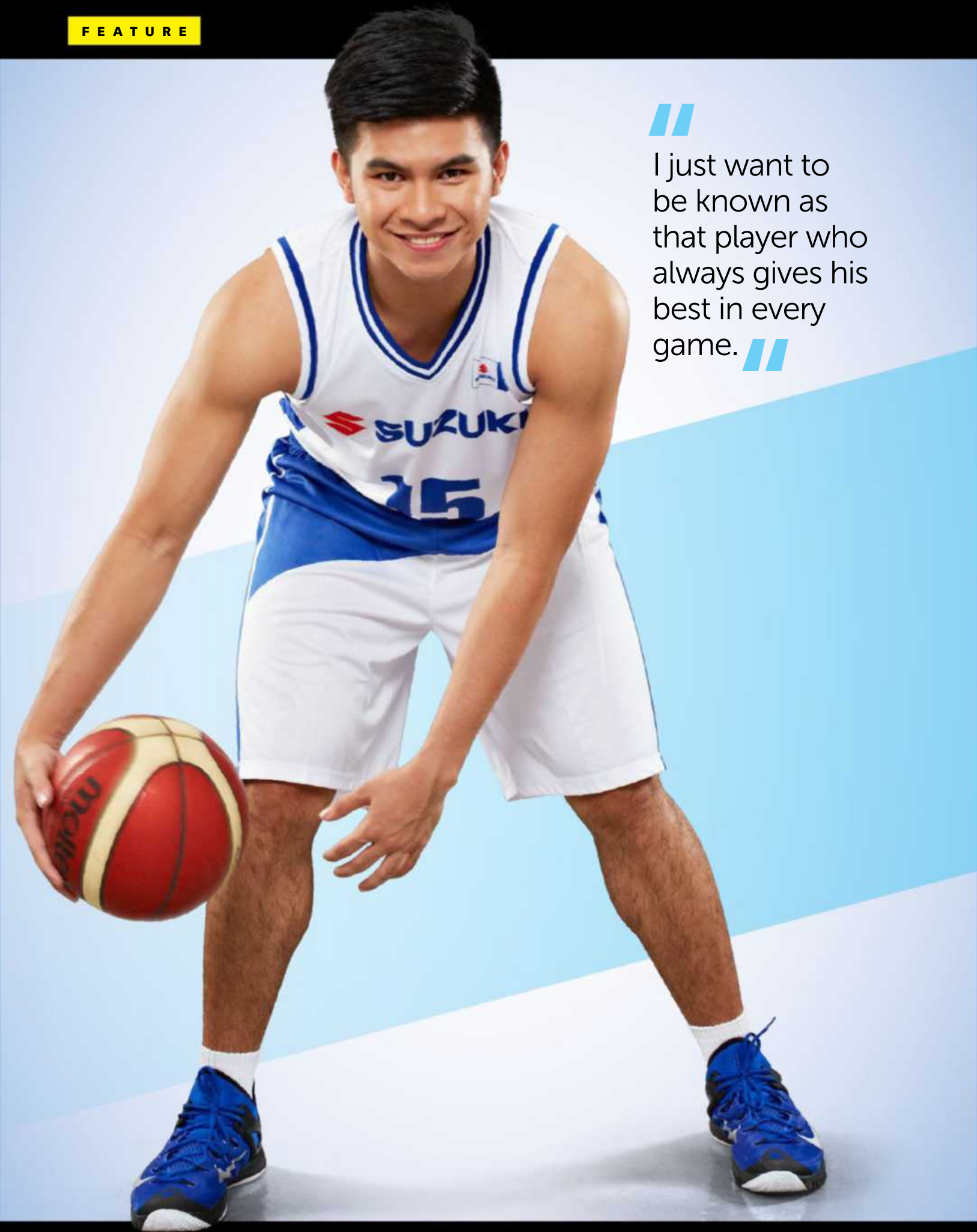
People following your game in this season's UAAP are looking forward to your second-straight MVP award. What are you focusing on to make sure that you earn it?
I just have to play my best. It's just about winning, trying to find a way to put your team in a position to be successful. I want to win the championship this year and everything else will be a bonus.





AUTOMOTIVE ATHLETE

With a 2.4-liter, 4-cylinder VVT engine and sporty 18-inch dark-silver alloy wheels, the Grand Vitara Special Edition is an off-road athlete both inside and out. What makes this Grand Vitara extra special is its bright champagne-silver accents for the center console, meter rings, shift knob, side louvre bezels, steering wheel, and door trim, as well as exclusive suede and fabric seat upholstery for an even grander look. A maximum output of 168hp and 227Nm of torque ensure that no terrain will be untouchable while sitting behind the wheel of this elegantly sporty car.



"I just want to be known as that player who always gives his best in every game."



Suzuki Swift: Top Choice for Top Players

For Filipino millennials, "busy" is more than an adjective—it is now a way of life meant to be enjoyed and pursued with fervor. They are eager to combine their passions with their responsibilities, resulting to a long to-do list for even the simplest day.

No wonder why the high-flying cager Kiefer Ravena chose the Suzuki Swift to be his daily driving partner. With a day-to-day schedule filled with athletic and academic activities, Kiefer needs a car that performs like he does on the hardcourt—dependable, consistent, and constantly on the pursuit of excellence.

The Suzuki Swift perfectly matches the active stride of today's young urbanites. Now equipped with a powerful 1.2-liter, four-cylinder VVT engine, versatile carrying capacity, multiple storage spaces, 15-inch alloy wheels, premium interiors, and a bold, stylish design, this impressive compact car addresses the demands of modern urban life and more.



07:00 – 08:30 Day Starts

Kiefer begins his day early, sacrificing an hour or so of sleep to prepare his mind and body for the rest of the day. "It's important that I get to eat breakfast, go over the things I need to do, and envision the day as going as smoothly as possible," says the 21-year-old star cager. He emphasizes the importance of beginning the day already inside a "winning mindspace." Kiefer goes through his own set of morning rituals to be mentally ready to deal with any challenge thrown his way.

Driving his Suzuki Swift every day helps Kiefer sustain his mental preparedness throughout the morning. "Worrying about the car's performance is a thought I don't need," he says. "With my dependable Swift, everything is smooth and actually relaxing. It's a good thing, because I can't afford to be distracted this early in the day."



11:30 – 13:00 Lunch

Other students take the word "break" in "lunch break" seriously, but Kiefer remains on fire. For lunch, he typically goes over his class notes or meet with his classmates for a group project. Kiefer can really apply his teamwork skills on and off the court!

"Getting people together to discuss our class concerns and tasks over lunch is truly a "break" for me," says Kiefer. They usually head over to Kiefer's usual hangout near his school in his compact Swift, perfect for the area's notoriously tight parking spaces during lunchtime.

"I also like to do assignments or read handouts during lunch break," he adds. "It's a perfect time for a bit of solitude to refocus on what needs to be done in the afternoon."



09:00 – 11:30 Class Time

Though one of the finest athletes of his generation, Kiefer doesn't slack off in his academic performance.

He employs the values of his athletic training passionately in his academic life, too.

"Student athletes are expected to perform well on the court and in class," he says. "That challenges me to strive to be excellent in both fields." Kiefer, a Communications Technology Management major, takes his studies seriously as he does basketball. He shows up to class prepared, right down to textbooks, handouts, and other class materials, as well as his head "in the game" for rigorous subjects that demand intense focus and critical thinking skills.

"It's great that the Swift has versatile carrying capacity and a lot of storage spaces to hold my school stuff. I hate forgetting things at home whenever I need them for class," Kiefer adds. The Swift's hatchback and backseats are perfect for creating ideal storage solutions for gym bags, athletic equipment, heavy books, delicate class projects, and more.



13.30 – 16:30 Boxing Training

After lunch and friendly conversations, Kiefer typically heads out for a bout of boxing before basketball training. Like many star athletes, Kiefer always looks out for activities that complement his basketball training for consistently excellent performance. "Boxing helps me maintain core and stance balance," he says. "It's very helpful in full-body training that comes very handy in the court."

He keeps a separate gym bag for his boxing needs in the car. "If it's not already obvious, I like being prepared," Kiefer says with a laugh. "I think my Swift is the perfect match for this trait. There's always a place to stash something I might need."



17:00 – 20:00 Basketball Training

"In the afternoons, I have to return to campus for basketball training," says Kiefer. "Before, this used to be a problem because the campus parking tends to be tight at this time, and I have to lug around bags from one part of my school to the other." With his Suzuki Swift, getting to team practice is not only quick and easy, but also convenient and comfortable.

His afternoon "appointment" with the rest of the team is something that Kiefer considers to be the highlight of his day. "Basketball is my true passion," he says with a smile. "I look forward to being in this gym every day and spending hours perfecting the team's game."

Even with his numerous achievements in collegiate basketball, including winning Rookie of the Year honors, breaking score records, and being named King Eagle and MVP, Kiefer still remains extremely fascinated with the sport. "It's like there's something new to discover every day."

At the end of the training session, he smiles shyly as he loads his bags in his Suzuki Swift. "This car is really instrumental in allowing me to focus on my passion. It's perfect for fast-paced days like mine."



20:30 Day Ends

Later in the evening, Kiefer is still energetic for his drive home. "I really love driving this car," he says. "I'll probably grow tired of my Swift when I get tired of basketball, which is never," he adds with a laugh.

Kiefer is also amazed with the built-in fog lamps, which he gamely turns on for "demo" purposes. "See! You can really see better with these babies." This feature makes for clear and safe driving in the evenings, especially in parts of the metro where roads are wide and streetlights offer inadequate lighting.

When he gets home, Kiefer will rest a bit, leisurely preparing for another busy day ahead before calling it a night.

An Easy, Enjoyable Day with the Suzuki Swift

Like Kiefer, you can pursue your passions and make your day as productive as possible with the Suzuki Swift. Visit the nearest Suzuki Philippines auto dealer and find out how you can stay on top of your game!

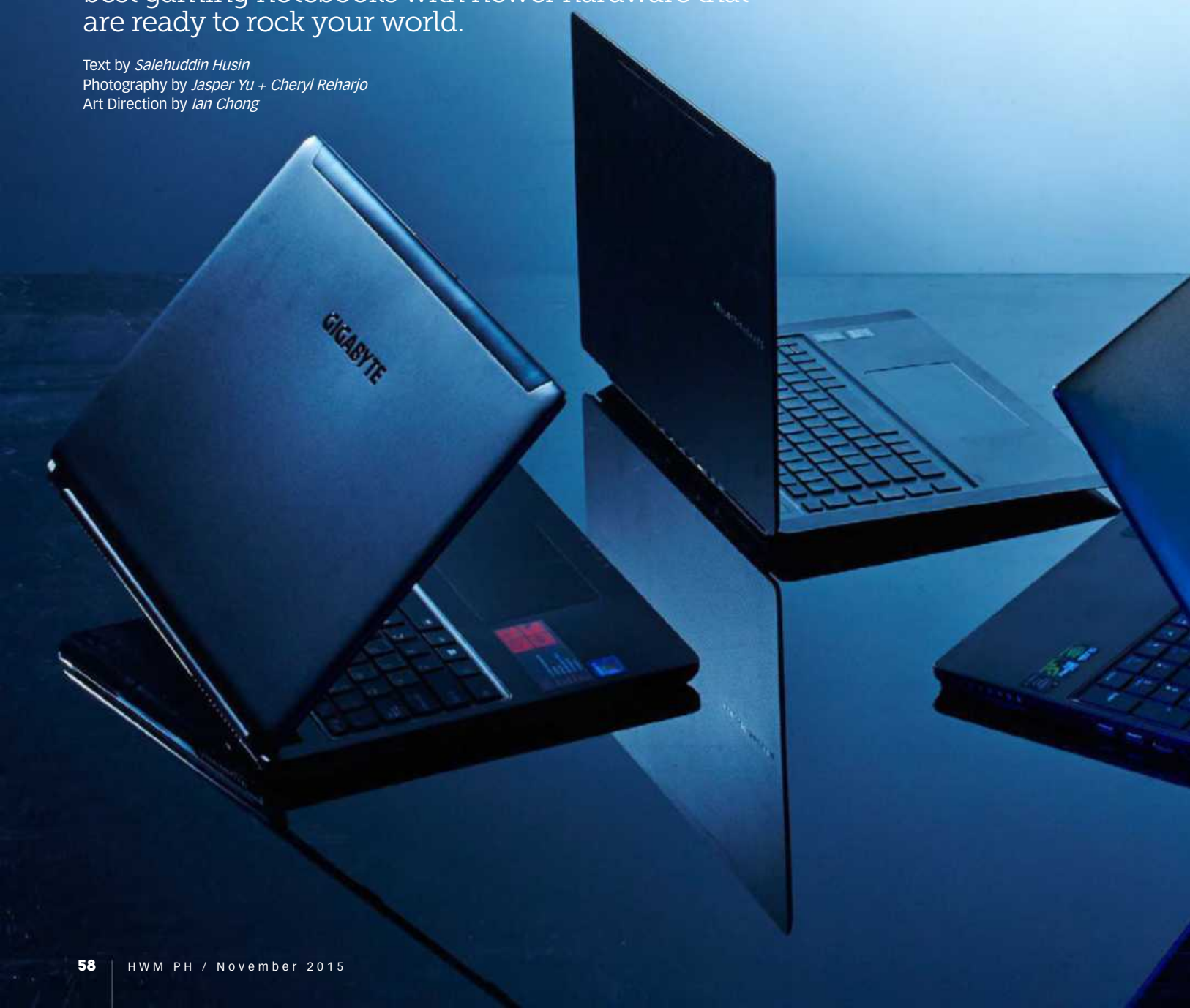


SUZUKI
Way of Life!

LIGHTWEIGHT GAMING PERFORMANCE

Being a slim 15-inch notebook is a constant juggling act to keep hardware in balance. How do you get gaming-grade performance and keep things portable and stylish? Here are some of the best gaming notebooks with newer hardware that are ready to rock your world.

Text by *Salehuddin Husin*
Photography by *Jasper Yu + Cheryl Reharjo*
Art Direction by *Ian Chong*




VS
AORUS X5
•
ASUS ROG G501
•
GIGABYTE P35X V3
•
HP OMEN

AORUS X5

The Aorus X5 is the newest of the Aorus X series gaming notebooks, famed for being incredibly thin and light while packing an SLI configuration. The Aorus X5 continues this tradition with a mainstream offering of SLI NVIDIA GeForce GTX 965Ms.

While it may be a step down from the Aorus X7 Pro's SLI GeForce GTX 970Ms, the Aorus X5 is just a step behind the Gigabyte P35X V3 in our benchmarks. Its performance is clearly superior to a single NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970M, but just short of reaching the bar set by an NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M.

Design-wise, its aluminum chassis not only looks cool, but has a very solid feel. Most of the faults present in the Aorus X7 Pro have been ironed out in the new laptop. The trackpad is much more comfortable, more responsive, and is now textured for better feedback. The keyboard is also better at resisting smudges, though it is still very shallow in order to keep the notebook as thin as it is.

Another plus is that the Aorus X5 can optionally come with hardware encoding for streaming. If you're somebody who regularly streams your games, this piece of hardware comes in real handy, as it takes some of the strain of maintaining the stream off the CPU, letting it focus on other things.

Great looks. G-Sync.

Performance could be better. Expensive.

While the Aorus X7 Pro suffered from very high GPU temperatures at 84 degrees Celsius, the Aorus X5, with its lower-end GPUs and better heat dissipation, runs relatively cool at 70 degrees Celsius. Still, because it's an SLI system, NVIDIA's Optimus technology, which manages GPU usage to prolong battery life, isn't available. That's why the X5 only lasted a paltry 122 minutes in our battery life benchmark. Like before, this is a desktop replacement machine and not one you'd want to use untethered from a power point.

The best new feature is its G-Sync-compatible display, which compliments its graphics horsepower really well. So, you can run most of your games even at max settings and don't have to worry about screen tearing. It's an IPS panel, too, so colors and viewing angles are great.

AT A GLANCE

Processor
Intel Core i7-5700HQ (2.7GHz, 6MB cache)

Display
WQHD+ (2880 x 1620) IPS, G-Sync capable

Memory
16gb

Graphics
SLI NVIDIA GeForce GTX 965M (8GB VRAM)

Storage
M.2 512GB (256GB x 2 in RAID 0) SSD + 1TB HDD

TAP FOR WEBSITE





The Aorus logo serves as the power button, which also lights up whenever the machine is activated.



The trackpad is textured so that you can feel when you're reaching the bottom portion of the usable space.

ASUS ROG G501

If you're familiar with ASUS, the ROG G501 will be like visiting an old friend. The 15.6-inch machine, while slim, evokes a G751 vibe, with the trademark ROG black and red scheme.

While we're still awaiting Skylake updates, ASUS packs in a decent amount of tech for a very compelling gaming notebook. The G501 has a brilliant 4K display, 16GB of RAM, and 512GB of SSD storage. It is the only other notebook here with this much SSD space, though Gigabyte does supplement theirs with a traditional HDD for more storage. The G501 is just a little over 2KG, lightweight enough to carry.

If you're a portable gamer, its humongous battery capacity will be a huge draw. In our tests, it lasted 223 minutes, nearly unheard of for a gaming machine.

In our benchmarks, the machine posted scores similar to that of the HP Omen, even though the latter came with an NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M instead of the NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960M present in the ASUS. In *Tomb Raider* on High, for example, the ASUS notebook posted an average frame rate of 62.2, a couple of frames better than the HP Omen's 58.2 average frame rate. While its performance is sufficient for Full HD gameplay, frame rates expectantly tank at 4K. This is a big deal if you specifically chose this notebook for its 4K display. While you can rock a sick wallpaper, it doesn't have the GPU power to drive 4K games.

4K display. Long-lasting battery.

Average performance. No extra gamer-centric features.

For an ROG machine, it's also surprisingly light on gamer-centric features. Sure, the WASD keys have extra red highlights, but other than that, there isn't anything special about the keyboard. There aren't any macro keys or special shortcuts – just the basic keyboard and numpad.

Ultimately, choosing the ASUS ROG G501 depends on the user. Its uniquely long-lasting battery, massive PCIe-based storage, 4K display, and lightweight nature will undoubtedly sway casual gamers with a penchant for 4K movies, but for hardcore gamers, there are other options that might be better suited for them, like the 17-inch ROG G751JT.

AT A GLANCE

Processor
Intel Core i7-4720HQ (2.6GHz, 6MB cache)

Display
4K (3840 x 2160) LCD

Memory
16GB

Graphics
NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960M (4GB VRAM)

Storage
512GB SSD





The machine's keyboard actually has highlighted WASD keys so that you can spot them easier in a pinch.



The speakers at the side of the machine aren't as big as those in other laptops.

GIGABYTE P35X V3

If there is a machine that can be called unassuming, that machine would be the Gigabyte P35X V3. It's not flashy like the ASUS ROG G501 or as sleek as the HP Omen, but its subdued appearance belies its impressive horsepower. It might be a tad heavy compared to some of the other entries in the shootout at 2.3kg, but it also has something rarely seen in slim notebooks nowadays, gaming or otherwise. It has a DVD multi-drive.

With a brilliant WQHD+ display, it delivers stunning picture quality and decent gaming experience at this resolution, thanks to the NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M that's powering it. In our benchmarking sessions of *Middle Earth: Shadow of Mordor*, the machine posted an impressive score of 67.57 on Ultra settings.

The machine will also serve well as a portable device with a battery life decent enough to last 182 minutes (that's three hours long) – a feat only the ASUS ROG G501 managed to beat.

Unfortunately, the machine also shares some of the downfalls that plagued the Aorus X7 Pro. Its chiclet-type keyboard is unsatisfying due to the lack of travel, and tends to get smudged very easily. If you're a neat freak, the P35X V3 will drive you up the wall.

The machine also gets warm with use. We recorded an 84 degrees Celsius running temperature for the GPU, one of the hottest around for a single GPU system. The Aorus X7 Pro had a temperature of 85 degrees Celsius, which was expected because of its SLI nature. On the Gigabyte machine, it may come down to inadequate cooling for such a powerful GPU.

Great performance. Quality display.

Very expensive.

The Gigabyte P35X V3 has the second-lowest SSD capabilities in our shootout. However, it is also the only one besides the Aorus X5 to have a supplementary 1TB HDD to boost storage capacity.

The NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M represents one of the most powerful graphics cards to have on a notebook. Combined with a great display and an optical drive, the P35X V3 is a well-rounded powerhouse. However, both the Aorus X5 and ASUS ROG G501 offer dedicated features, be it performance or battery life, at a more palatable cost.

AT A GLANCE

Processor
Intel Core i7-4710HQ (2.5GHz, 6MB cache)

Display
WQHD+ (2880 x 1620) LCD

Memory
16gb

Graphics
NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M (8GB VRAM)

Storage
256GB SSD + 1TB

TAP FOR WEBSITE





Unlike the other notebooks, the Gigabyte has speakers that span the length of its base.



The Gigabyte machine is the only notebook in the shootout that has an optical drive for physical discs.

HP OMEN

The Omen is HP's first foray back into the world of hardcore gaming after a long absence. Despite that, the HP Omen is one of the best-looking gaming notebooks we've ever seen, 15-inch or not.

Its aluminum chassis feels great to touch. It's cool (both in temperature and looks) and gives the notebook a sturdy feel, which is a plus. The HP Omen is also one of the few gaming notebooks with a touchscreen.

The HP Omen's unique in that its Beats speakers line the sides of the device, instead of being at the top like ones found in other machines. While the speakers themselves are nothing special, they do deliver decent sound and convincing bass for their size.

Great looks. Great build quality.

Last-generation graphics card.

It's also the only one that comes with customizable backlighting. The Omen has a utility that allows you to manage the colors on the keyboard and assign specific colors to custom sections. On top of that, you can customize shortcuts, both using the physical keys and the touchscreen. The touchscreen would come in handy on newer versions of Windows and certain apps, but not much use in regular PC gaming.

The machine's build quality is excellent which impressed us a ton. Sadly, while the HP Omen is pleasing to the eyes, it's a bit sluggish when it comes to showing what it can do. While the Omen's processor isn't bad, an older NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M and lower RAM bogged down the unit. You'll get decent frame rates on average settings, but we won't recommend trying to play games on High or beyond.

Even if we look at longevity, the HP Omen's still bringing up the rear. The paltry 58Wh battery found in the HP Omen means it lasted just 98 minutes in our benchmarks, and this is with the help of NVIDIA's Optimus technology. We shudder to think what its battery life might be without it.

We're not ready to write the Omen off just yet, though. HP has the design part of it down pat; they just have to make sure its hardware is up to snuff in the next iteration, or all will be for naught.

AT A GLANCE

Processor
Intel Core i7-4710HQ (2.5GHz, 6MB cache)

Display
Full HD (1920 x 1080) IPS Touchscreen

Memory
8GB

Graphics
NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M (2GB VRAM)

Storage
128GB SSD





The HP Omen's hinge has a slight discoloration to it, which is actually a conscious design choice.

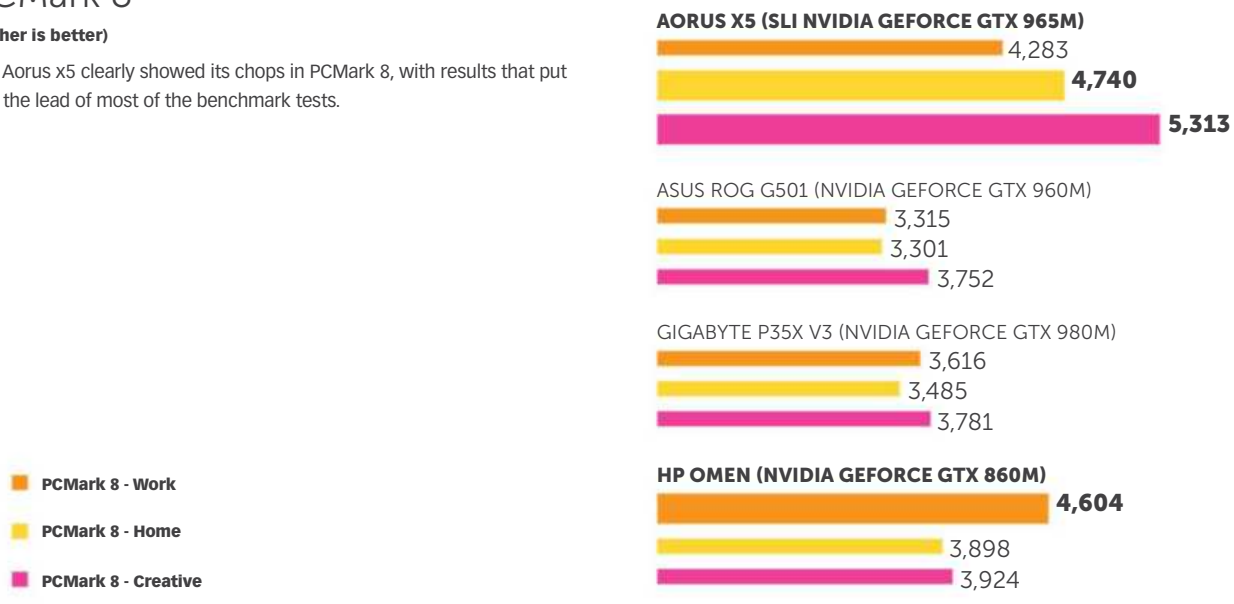


The HP Omen's base is different from the others with its slanted inwards, and non-rectangular shape.

PCMark 8

(higher is better)

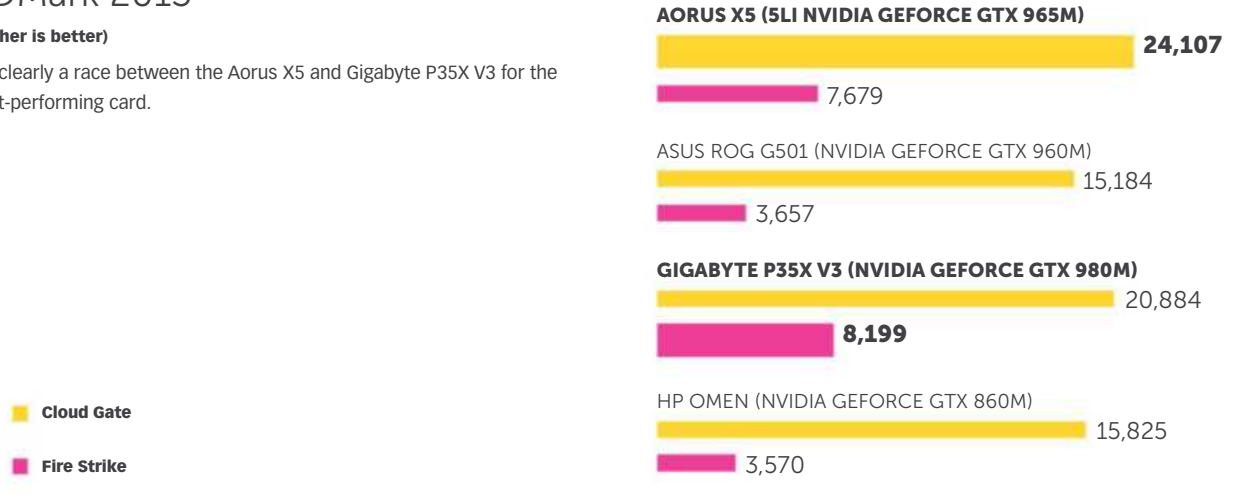
The Aorus x5 clearly showed its chops in PCMark 8, with results that put it in the lead of most of the benchmark tests.



3DMark 2013

(higher is better)

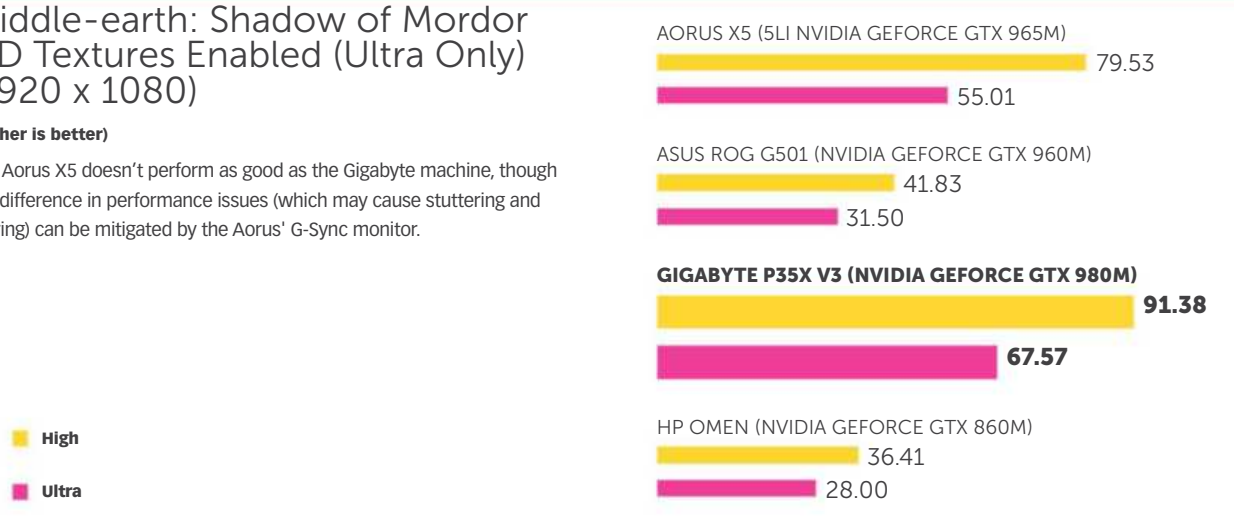
It's clearly a race between the Aorus X5 and Gigabyte P35X V3 for the best-performing card.



Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor HD Textures Enabled (Ultra Only) (1920 x 1080)

(higher is better)

The Aorus X5 doesn't perform as good as the Gigabyte machine, though the difference in performance issues (which may cause stuttering and tearing) can be mitigated by the Aorus' G-Sync monitor.

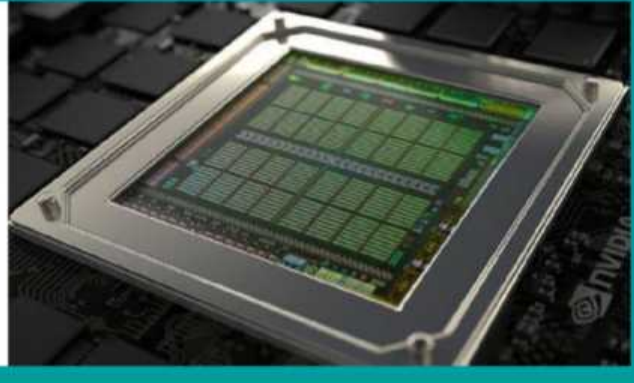




MODEL	AORUS X5	ASUS G501	GIGABYTE P35X V3	HP OMEN
PROCESSOR	Intel Core i7-5700HQ (2.7GHz, 6MB cache)	Intel Core i7-4720HQ (2.6GHz, 6MB cache)	Intel Core i7-4710HQ (2.5GHz, 6MB cache)	Intel Core i7-4710HQ (2.5GHz, 6MB cache)
DISPLAY	WQHD+ (2880 x 1620) IPS (G-Sync capable)	4K (3840 x 2160) LCD	WQHD+ (2880 x 1620) LCD	Full HD (1920 x 1080) IPS Touchscreen
GRAPHICS	SLI NVIDIA GeForce GTX 965M (8GB VRAM)	NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960M (4GB VRAM)	NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M (8GB VRAM)	NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M (2GB VRAM)
RAM	16GB	16GB	16GB	8GB
STORAGE	M.2 512GB (256GB x 2 in RAID 0) SSD + 1TB HDD	512GB SSD	256GB SSD + 1TB	128GB SSD
BATTERY CAPACITY	73.26Wh	60Wh	75.81Wh	58Wh
DIMENSIONS	390 x 272 x 22.9mm	383 x 255 x 20.6mm	385 x 270 x 20.9mm	382.9 x 245.7 x 19.9mm
WEIGHT	2.5kg	2.06kg	2.3kg	2.12kg

THE MAXWELL GPU ARCHITECTURE

NVIDIA cards all have their own unique code names based on their technology. Maxwell is NVIDIA's current-generation architecture for CUDA applications. It introduces a new Streaming Multiprocessor design that improves energy efficiency, which means cards using the new architecture run on less energy while still delivering performance improvements over the older cards. Maxwell also includes improvements to a number of inner workings of the engine, which gives developers greater control over logic partitioning, workload balancing, and other important aspects. The bottom line is that Maxwell gives developers greater control over more aspects of the architecture, which results in much-improved performance for everything from gaming to daily GPU usage.



PICTURE NOTEBOOKCHECK.NET

AND THE BEST 15-INCH GAMING NOTEBOOK IS...



AORUS X5

While it may not be the clear winner, we have to give the nod to the Aorus X5. True, the machine does have performance issues, but we're comparing it against a NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980M, one of the best single GPU cards on the market right now. Being a step behind the best isn't great (especially if you're an SLI machine), but it's nothing to be ashamed of either.

On top of that, the Aorus X5 has many other admirable qualities. It has copious storage via its HDD and fast SSD storage courtesy of its SSDs in RAID 0 mode, but the tipping point comes from the fact that the machine is the only one with a display that comes with NVIDIA's G-Sync enabled, which no other notebooks in the shootout have.

REAL-LIFE SPIDER-MAN: SUPER-SILK

by *Koh Wanzi*

Your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man may not be real, but his super-strong web might just be. Scientists at the University of Trento in Italy still don't know how to give you the powers of everyone's favorite web slinger, but they could just be on the path to the next best thing.

The researchers found a way to get spiders to weave webs infused with carbon nanotubes and graphene, and the result was spider silk that exceeds even the toughest knotted fibers in strength.

They did this by spraying five spiders from the Pholcidae family with a mixture of water and graphene particles 200mm to 300nm wide. Graphene consists of sheets of carbon just one atom thick. It is also one of the strongest artificial materials, which makes it apt that it would be combined with spider silk, one of the strongest natural materials.

Another ten spiders were also sprayed with carbon nanotubes and water to compare the effects of the two materials.

While the results were not always positive, some spiders received a major boost in web strength. The giant riverine orb spider that was dosed with nanotubes came out on top, and its silk was around 3.5 times as tough and strong as the best unaltered silk.

The process by which the spiders incorporate the new materials into their silk is still unclear, but one theory is that the spiders absorb the materials in their environment and weave it into their silk. And seeing that four of the spiders died soon after being sprayed, this certainly looks to be a possible explanation.

But while the technique is far from complete and it's not yet clear how such super-silk could be used, the researchers already think it could make previously implausible constructs a reality in the future, such as constructing a giant net capable of catching falling aircraft.



MIDRANGE IS THE NEW FLAGSHIP

Last year, a mid-tier smartphone with 4G connectivity would be a head-turner. Fast-forward to today, we have the same midrange models touting flagship processors and camera modules, monstrous RAM, premium materials, and dual-SIM functionality. Here are four such phones you can get for less than PhP 25,000.

Text by *Liu Hongzuo*
Photography by *Darren Chang + Angela Guo*
Art Direction by *Ken Koh + Ian Chong*





ONEPLUS 2

Last year, OnePlus made a name for itself with its high-performance, low-price OnePlus One smartphone, a flagship-level device sold at midrange level prices. A year on, the OnePlus is back and more confident than ever, proclaiming its latest smartphone as the "2016 Flagship Killer."

Unlike the mostly plastic predecessor, the OnePlus 2 boasts a new frame made from magnesium/aluminum alloy, resulting in a successor that feels premium. Besides having a fingerprint scanner on the Home button, there's also an Alert Slider switch to the side for toggling notification alerts and ringtones. It feels really solid, and it is hard to flick it to the wrong position and end up missing an important call.

Great value. Flagship-tier performance.

Difficult to buy.

While it still won't catch up to the flagship Samsung Galaxy Note 5 or S6 Edge in terms of benchmarking results, the combination of 4GB RAM, an octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 810 processor, and Adreno 430 graphics unit makes the OnePlus 2 hum along with no signs of lag in everyday use – between games, videos, and apps. The modified Android operating system, OxygenOS, on the OnePlus 2 seems to play nicely with the phone's available resources.

This brings us to the extra functionality that OxygenOS gives us, which is beyond what stock Android OS offers. OnePlus 2 has app-by-app permission settings. While it's not a new concept, it makes the process feel more controllable than stock Android OS. There's also Shelf, a feature that lists your most frequent contacts and apps, but it is essentially another version of Google Now.

Premium-grade qualities aside, the OnePlus 2 does carry the traits that make it a thorough Chinese-made smartphone with features borrowed from its harshest critics. There's dual-SIM with LTE connectivity on both slots, but no microSD card slot. It may be one of the first commercially available smartphones with a USB Type-C port, but it doesn't have USB 3.1 transfer speeds. The biggest peeve is exactly the same one as its predecessor: You can only purchase the device with an invite bestowed upon you by OnePlus themselves.

Despite its shortcomings, the OnePlus 2 is certainly a grade above its mid-tier peers. To call it a flagship killer of 2016 is hyperbole, since it's only keeping up with the competition from this year's flagships. Nonetheless, the OnePlus 2 is certainly an amazing bang for the buck, if you can get an invite to buy one.

TAP FOR WEBSITE



AT A GLANCE

Display
5.5-inch IPS LCD, 1920 x 1080 pixels (403 ppi)

Processor
Qualcomm Snapdragon 810 (Octa-core, 1.5GHz)

Weight
175g

Dimension
151.8 x 74.9 x 9.9mm

Price
PhP 20,990 (www.widgetcity.com.ph)



The rear 13-megapixel camera features laser autofocus and OIS.



The default Sandstone Black rear cover has a grip-friendly texture.



The OnePlus 2 uses a USB Type-C port for charging and file transfers.

OPPO R7

The OPPO R5 was known for being 4.85mm thin, but it had a tiny battery capacity to contend with. The R7 ramps up the quality of the phone across the board, topped off with a premium finish to the phone's chassis.

Currently, the R7 measures 6.3mm thin, but the phone still feels very slender to the touch. It's one of a handful of midrange smartphones with a proper metal unibody frame with a rear made from an aircraft-grade magnesium/aluminum alloy. OPPO also claims that its R7 has undergone 48 polishing processes to achieve its current look. The sides feature chamfered metal edges that interrupt the rounded bezel finish on the rear and front glass to provide excellent grip.

The R7's 5-inch Full HD (1080 x 1920 pixels) AMOLED screen with nearly 441ppi makes the colors look vibrant, and the high pixel density makes images appear really sharp. With ColorOS 2.1's Eye Protection Display, you can pick between three settings for different filter intensities of shortwave blue light, which helps to reduce eye strain while using the smartphone.

This particular model has a nano-SIM, micro-SIM combination with dual-standby support. You could also choose to give up the second SIM card slot to insert a microSD card of up to 128GB, making the default 16GB internal storage less of a problem.

The phone uses a decent midrange processor (Snapdragon 615) coupled with 3GB RAM. It does not struggle when loading web pages, with only slight stuttering when you open a new tab or when you wake the locked phone up in the middle of browsing. Actual usage was smooth, save for launching or switching between apps.

Premium chassis and practical features.

Low internal storage.

The OPPO R7's 2320mAh battery capacity lasted nearly 10 hours in our test, which is very decent for a smartphone with less battery life than its peers. What the R7 has in its favor is the proprietary VOOC Flash Charge Mini, which uses increased voltage charging to achieve the same quick charging effect as Qualcomm's Quick Charge 2.0. Our test device gets roughly 25% every half hour, so it's possible to have 100% in just two hours.

It's likely that the OPPO R7 will be overshadowed by the R7 Plus, but the smartphone feels complete on its own. While it may not be the best buy among other models, such as Xiaomi's Mi Note, the OPPO R7 does justice to design detail and practical features.

TAP FOR WEBSITE



AT A GLANCE

Display
5.0-inch AMOLED
1080 x 1920 pixels
(441 ppi)

Processor
Qualcomm Snapdragon 615
(Octa-core, 1.5GHz)

Weight
147g

Dimension
143 x 71 x 6.3mm

Price
US$ 399



The R7's speaker is on the rear, limiting its audio capabilities when the phone is facing up.



The OPPO R7 has a dual-SIM slot with the second tray doubling as a microSD card slot.



A 2.5D arc edge screen accentuates the premium quality of its build.

SAMSUNG GALAXY A8

Like its earlier companions – the A3, A5, and A7 – the 5.9mm-thin phablet comes with a metal unibody, which gives the device a premium look and feel. Samsung made the 5.9mm metal frame chamfered for extra style points. Despite its broad phablet dimensions, the A8 is easy to grip with evenly distributed weight.

The A8 uses a 5.7-inch Full HD (1920 x 1080 pixels) Super AMOLED display at 386ppi. Image is sufficiently sharp with vibrant colors; the screen is bright at 100%, but not glaring.

Well-optimized. Flagship features.

Bloatware galore.

They did adopt a handful of features from the Galaxy S6, but some of them are quite unnecessary. An example would be Briefing: When not in use, Briefing does tend to take up precious time and processing power if you scroll to it accidentally. On the flip side, the A8 does come with features that are actually useful and practical.

The A8 has a unique two-tray design for its dual-nano SIM slot. The primary SIM slot works with LTE Cat 6 networks, but the secondary slot is only compatible with 2G networks.

The fingerprint sensor on the A8 delivers its purpose, providing an alternative to users for securing their phone. The phone also has a micro-USB 2.0 port with OTG (on-the-go) support. This means that you can connect a USB OTG drive to it, and it acts as additional storage for the phone.

Like most of its new devices, the A8 uses Samsung's own Exynos 5430 octa-core processor. Performance was satisfactory in benchmarks and real-world testing; certainly not as nimble as flagship models like the Samsung Galaxy Note 5, but the A8 performs speedily, with nary a jitter in its everyday use.

The A8 uses a 16-megapixel camera for the rear and a 5-megapixel front camera, and we feel that the camera's quality is good for a midrange smartphone. Sharpness is intact, and colors are generally acceptable, save for the ones that are difficult to tell apart.

The 3050mAh capacity on the A8 gives it decent battery life. With activity time north of 14 hours, the smartphone is able go unplugged for the greater part of the day.

On its own, the Samsung Galaxy A8 is indeed a good alternative to the flagship Galaxy S series. Unfortunately, unless you're set on a Samsung, the A8 has to go up against the cheaper Chinese competition with similar or better hardware, performance, and build quality.

TAP FOR WEBSITE



AT A GLANCE

Display
5.7-inch Super AMOLED
1920 x 1080 pixels
(386 ppi)

Processor
Samsung Exynos 5430
(Octa-core)

Weight
151g

Dimension
158 x 76.8 x 5.9mm

Price
PhP 24,990



The display looks large, thanks to the 2.5mm-thin bezels.



The Galaxy A8 uses a modified Galaxy S6 camera module to fit its thin profile.



Separate dual-SIM trays make this model unique from most of the competition.

XIAOMI MI NOTE

The 5.7-inch Mi Note phablet is a cut above the wallet-friendly offerings Xiaomi has offered in the past, and its premium design, build, and specs put it in the same league as flagships from other smartphone giants.

The Mi Note has array of impressive features, such as a 13-megapixel Sony camera with OIS, 3000mAh capacity battery, dual nano- and micro-SIM card tray slots, and an onboard ESS ES9018K2M stereo DAC (digital-to-analog converter) that grants the phablet lossless audio playback. Its metal frame bears resemblance to the iPhone and Samsung Galaxy smartphones, but with curved glass wrapping the front and back.

Overall performance. Physical build quality.

No expandable storage.

If we look at benchmark numbers, the Mi Note measures on par with the iPhone 6 Plus and even outperforms the iOS-based phone at graphics-processing and CPU tests with its Snapdragon 801 chip. Same could be said for its rear camera; image quality is very good and rivals any other flagship phone out there. The optical image stabilization works well, and low-light shots retain detail and sharpness.

One interesting feature would be Xiaomi giving plenty of care to the audio capabilities of the Mi Note. The difference between the Mi Note and iPhone 6 is readily apparent when you use the Mi Note's high-res (24-bit/192kHz) audio player, paired with a decent pair of headphones and 192-bit AAC music tracks. While the integrated speakers are sufficiently loud and clear, the one-directional quality of the audio does make it less than ideal for landscape watching.

Laudable qualities aside, the Mi Note sadly doesn't come with a microSD card slot. We feel fine with missing out on the 16GB version, since the Android-based MIUI 6 would leave it with barely 10GB left on a phone with no external storage. Despite how closely it resembles the iPhone 6 Plus, Xiaomi probably should have left this Android advantage in the phablet. Also, the Mi Note heats up considerably with extended high-performance usage, but that seems to be commonplace among Android-based devices.

The Mi Note is still an unbelievably good buy. Ignoring the absence of an expandable storage, it has no other major kinks. For its price, it's pretty much a steal, given its build and performance.

TAP FOR WEBSITE



AT A GLANCE

Display
5.7-inch IPS LCD
1920 x 1080 pixels
(386 ppi)

Processor
Qualcomm Snapdragon 801
(Quad-core, 2.5GHz)

Weight
161g

Dimension
155.1 x 77.6 x 6.95mm

Price
US$ 499



Curved glass in the front and back make the Mi Note fit nicely in the hand.



The Mi Note uses nano-molding technology to get its textured aluminum bezel.

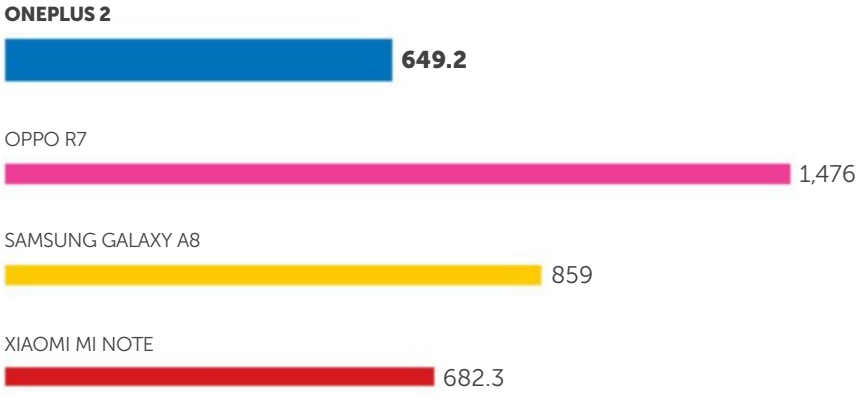


The Mi Note also uses two separate trays for dual-SIM compatibility.

SunSpider JavaScript

(lower is better)

SunSpider JavaScript helps measure the browsing performance of a device when processing JavaScript. It not only takes into consideration the underlying hardware performance, but also assesses how optimized a particular platform is at delivering a high-speed web browsing experience.



Battery Performance

(higher is better)

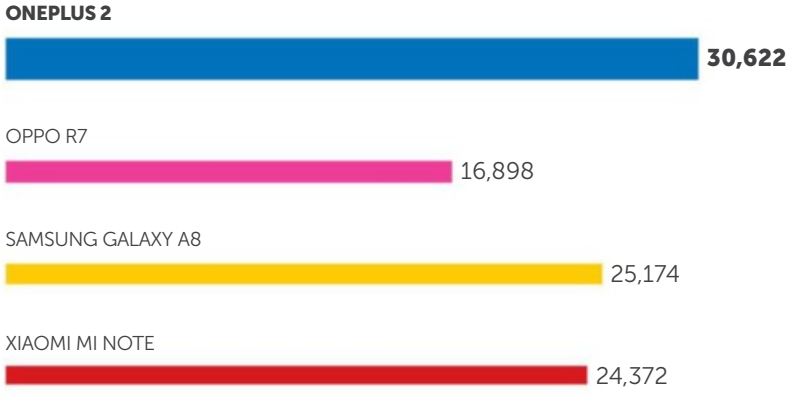
We used a 800 x 480-pixel resolution video under the follow conditions: screen brightness and volume at 100%, with Wi-Fi active and Bluetooth running, on top of constant data streaming from email and Twitter.



Quadrant

(higher is better)

The Quadrant benchmark evaluates a device's CPU, memory, I/O, and 2D/3D graphics performance. It takes into account the hardware available for each device, as well as their optimization, which includes the device's ability to move between apps and how resource-hungry they are while in use.











MODEL	ONEPLUS 2	OPPO R7	SAMSUNG GALAXY A8	XIAOMI MI NOTE
OS	Android 5.1.1 Lollipop with Oxygen OS 2.0	Android 4.4.2 KitKat with ColorOS 2.1	Android 5.1 Lollipop with TouchWiz	Android 4.4.2 Jelly Bean with MIUI 6
PROCESSOR	Qualcomm Snapdragon 810 octa-core (quad-core 1.5GHz Cortex-A53 + quad-core 2GHz Cortex-A57)	Qualcomm Snapdragon 615 octa-core 1.5GHz	Samsung Exynos 5430 octa-core (quad-core 1.8GHz + quad-core 1.3GHz)	Qualcomm Snapdragon 801 quad-core 2.5GHz
MEMORY	4GB RAM	3GB RAM	2GB RAM	3GB RAM
STORAGE	64GB Internal	16GB Internal, microSD slot up to 128GB	32GB Internal, microSD up to 128GB	64GB Internal
DISPLAY	5.5-inch IPS LCD 1920 x 1080 pixels (403 ppi)	5.0-inch AMOLED 1080 x 1920 pixels (441 ppi)	5.7-inch Super AMOLED 1920 x 1080 pixels (386 ppi)	5.7-inch IPS LCD 1920 x 1080 pixels (386 ppi)
REAR CAMERA	13-megapixel, f/2.0, laser autofocus, optical image stabilization, dual-LED flash	13-megapixel, f/2.2, Samsung 3M2 with ISOCELL technology, Schneider-Kreuznach optics, phase-detection autofocus, LED flash, anti-shake optimization	16-megapixel, ISOCELL technology, autofocus, LED flash	13-megapixel with Sony sensor, f/2.0, dual-LED flash, optical image stabilization
FRONT CAMERA	5MP	8MP	5MP	4MP, f/2.0, 2µm pixel size
CONNECTIVITY	Bluetooth 4.1, Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac (2.4 and 5GHz), Micro-USB Type-C, 4G LTE	Bluetooth 4.0, Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac (2.4 and 5GHz), NFC, DLNA, Micro-USB 2.0	Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac (2.4 and 5GHz), Wi-Fi Direct, GLONASS, Quick Connect	Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac, Bluetooth 4.1, GPS, Dual 4G LTE
BATTERY	3300mAh	2320mAh	3050mAh	3000mAh
PRICE	PhP 20,990 (www.widgetcity.com.ph)	US$ 399	PhP 24,990	US$ 499



AND THE BEST MAINTREAM FLAGSHIP SMARTPHONE IS...

TEST BEST PERFORMANCE HWM PHILIPPINES

ONEPLUS 2

We can see why they dare to call the OnePlus 2 the "Flagship Killer of 2016." While it doesn't actually live up to that title, against other current smartphones within its bracket, it's an outright bully. While we were very taken with the Xiaomi Mi Note when we first reviewed it in April, its Snapdragon 801 processor is showing its age. The Mi Note Pro would have been a better comparison, but Xiaomi isn't officially selling that in this region. Perhaps the higher powers like to play fair, because the only ways of buying a OnePlus 2 is through an invite code from OnePlus themselves or from the gray market.

The Sony Ericsson P910i (2004) boasted multiple input methods with a keypad that flips out to reveal a keyboard, which can be removed entirely in favor of stylus input and a larger screen.



PHOTOGRAPHY **DARREN CHANG** ART DIRECTION **KEN KOH**

Getting to Know Intel Z170

Text by ***Koh Wanzi*** Art Direction ***Ken Koh***

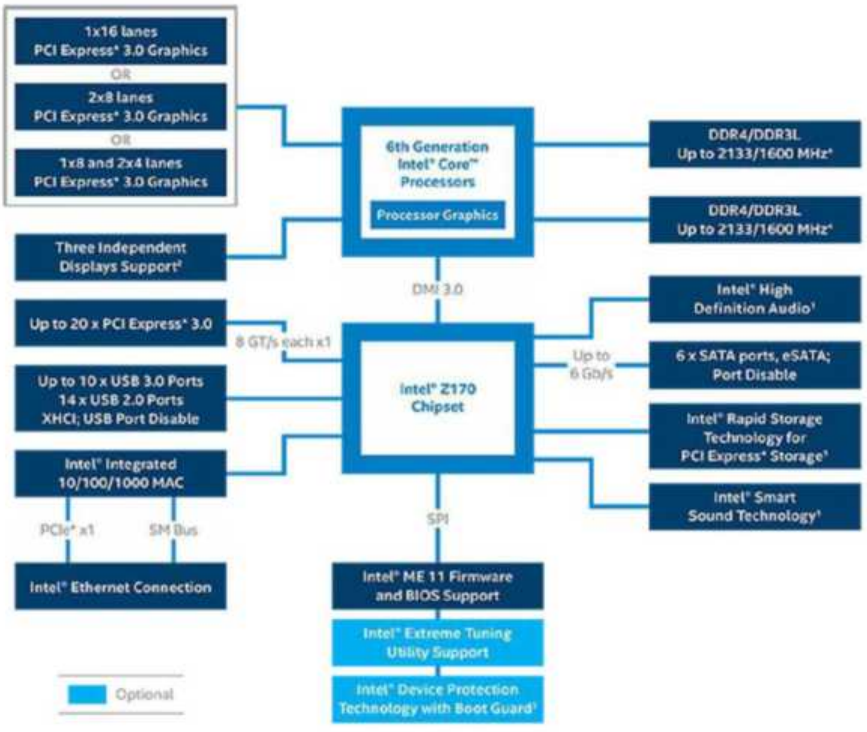
PC enthusiasts can finally breathe a sigh of relief. Now that the tedium that was Broadwell is safely out of the way, we can finally focus on the performance CPU parts that are Skylake and Intel's new Z170 chipset.

No more half-baked 65-watt parts! New Skylake desktop parts in the form of the Core i7-6700K and Core i5-6500K have already debuted, with a reassuring 91-watt Thermal Design Power (TDP) that we'd expect of CPUs geared for performance.

So the CPUs – a couple of them at least – are ready, but what about the chipset? Z170 offers several significant improvements over last year's Z97, and we'll take you through the key new features and their practical implications.

A Brand New Socket

Intel Z170 will feature a new LGA1151 CPU socket, which means you won't be able to use LGA1150 Haswell or Broadwell chips on a Z170 motherboard. Fortunately, Intel has maintained its practice of preserving CPU cooler compatibility across different socket generations, so you will still be able to use LGA1150/1155/1156 coolers with Z170 boards and Skylake CPUs.



Intel Z170 Chipset Diagram





PICTURE INTEL & ASUS

DDR4 arrives in the mainstream

One of the major steps forward for Intel Z170 is the support for DDR4 memory, which marks the first time that DDR4 support will be available on a chipset other than the ultra-enthusiast Intel X99. In fact, Skylake motherboards will dispense with support for DDR3 entirely, and will support either DDR4 or DDR3L RAM. But because the slots are different for each memory type, motherboards will only be able to support one of them, and the overwhelming majority of boards are going to opt for DDR4, which offers several advantages over older DDR3 modules.

For starters, DDR4 has a lower operating voltage of 1.2V, down from 1.5V on DDR3. It also boasts higher data transfer rates – Skylake's memory controller supports DDR4 2133MHz by default, as compared to DDR3 1600MHz on Haswell CPUs and Intel Z97. Furthermore, DDR4 enables higher memory densities, which means up to 16GB modules. Intel Z170 supports up to 64GB across four DIMMs, so you can really load up those RAM slots if you're of the persuasion that there is no such thing as too much RAM.

To cap things off, manufacturers are also releasing kits at frequencies that DDR3 would be hard-pressed to match. For instance, the new G.Skill Trident Z memory is available in kits clocked up to 4000MHz, nearly double that of the 2133MHz base specification.

These advantages aside, DDR4 does have a slightly higher CAS latency than DDR3 because of the higher memory frequencies. CAS latency is a measure of the time – or more precisely, the number of clock cycles – taken by the memory to send data back to the processor when it receives a command. On the other hand, memory frequencies indicate how quickly the system can access data on the RAM. So while it might seem like higher CAS latencies would mean that DDR4 is slower, the outcome isn't always so straightforward because the two work together to influence memory performance.

Memory performance is determined more accurately by the actual latency time, which is measured in nanoseconds (ns). Faster memory clock speeds result in shorter clock cycles between when the memory receives a command and when it actually responds, so even though the CAS latency goes up (more cycles) the actual latency time still decreases, resulting in overall faster memory.

PCIe 3.0 support and high-speed storage

With Z170, the processor is now connected to the chipset's Platform Controller Hub (PCH) by the upgraded DMI 3.0 protocol. Compared to the DMI 2.0 used in Z97, DMI 3.0 features a speed boost from 5.0GT/s to 8.0GT/s, which enables significant upgrades in chipset connectivity.

This explains why Intel Z170 is now able to support PCIe 3.0 on the chipset itself instead of PCIe 2.0 as on Z97. This results in a total of 20 PCIe 3.0 lanes being exposed through the chipset, compared to just eight PCIe 2.0 lanes on Z97. Skylake CPUs will continue to provide 16 PCIe 3.0 lanes for your graphics card, but additional PCIe 3.0 lanes on the chipset itself will now be available for use with PCIe 3.0 x4 storage devices.

These devices were, of course, supported on higher-end Z97 motherboards, but it entailed drawing from the 16 PCIe 3.0 lanes provided by the CPU. So if you plugged in an M.2 PCIe 3.0 x4 SSD into a compatible board, the bandwidth sharing would force the PCIe 3.0 x16 slot to run in x8 mode.

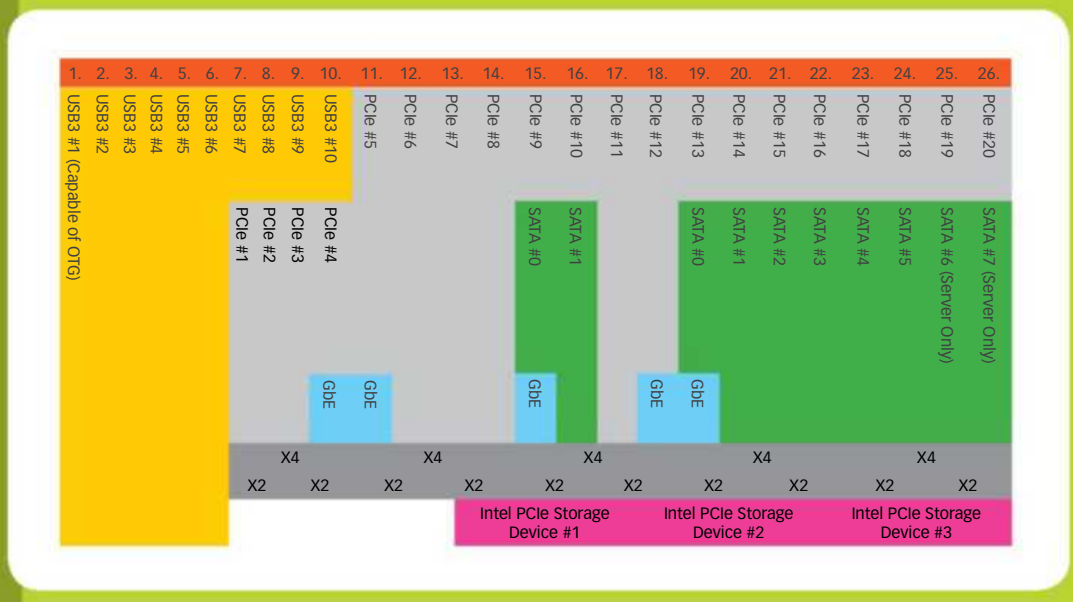
But with Z170, such bandwidth sharing is no longer necessary, and you'll be able to utilize the maximum available bandwidth for both your graphics card and PCIe 3.0 x4 SSD. PCIe-based SSDs will eventually replace SATA-based drives, and it's great to finally see proper support for high-speed storage devices on Intel's latest mainstream chipset.

More Connectivity Options

Z170 also has a far more flexible selection of High-speed Input/Output (HSIO) ports than Z97. While the latter had 18 such ports that could switch between the PCIe lanes, USB 3.0 ports, and SATA 6Gbps ports, Z170 now has 26 ports than can be implemented in a variety of ways.

This gives motherboard manufacturers a greater ability to pick and choose what combination of connectivity options they'd like to offer. For instance, the new Intel Rapid Storage Technology (RST) allows Z170 to support up to three PCIe devices at one time, which means that M.2 and SATA Express devices can be installed in RAID arrays as long as they are connected via these HSIO lanes. In





Intel Z170 HSIO port layout



addition, this would allow motherboard manufacturers to implement up to three PCIe 3.0 x4 M.2 slots on their boards, complete with RAID support.

But even though Z170 officially supports ten USB 3.0 ports (up from six on Z97), six SATA 6Gbps ports, and 20 PCIe 3.0 lanes, you can't have everything all at once, because the USB 3.0 and SATA ports use PCIe lanes, as well. For example, populating both M.2 PCIe 3.0 x4 slots on the MSI Z170A Gaming M9 ACK will end up disabling two of the six SATA 6Gbps ports. This is because the SATA ports use a PCIe lane each, which overlaps with the lanes used for the M.2 slots.

More expensive boards, but cooler CPUs

Finally, Intel Z170 will see motherboard manufacturers return to implementing voltage regulation on the board itself. This was the case prior to Haswell CPUs, but Z97 and Haswell/Broadwell processors saw Intel create a fully integrated voltage regulator (FIVR) on the CPU itself in order to reduce motherboard costs and power consumption. However, this also had a less desirable consequence in the form of additional heat output in overclocked CPUs. As a result, overclocking was limited by temperatures, and also by the varying quality of the FIVR on individual chips.

With Skylake and Z170, Intel has handed the task of voltage regulation back to the motherboard, which could result in cooler processors, but slightly more pricey boards.

The top two PCIe 3.0 x16 slots feature metal reinforcements to support heavier graphics cards.

Z170 Motherboards: A Sampling Platter

Of course, the aforementioned technicalities don't do a lot for visualization. We've rounded up a few boards from major manufacturers to show you what's really on offer.

ASRock Fatal1ty Z170 Gaming K6

The ASRock Z170 Gaming K6 sports a matte black PCB and striking accents of red along the heat sinks, PCIe, and RAM slots. The PCH heat sink has also been emblazoned with the silver praying mantis emblem of the Fatal1ty series.

Networking is handled by the Killer E2400 Ethernet controller that's also featured on boards from Gigabyte and MSI. Storage options include up to eight SATA 6Gbps ports and a single M.2 slot that supports both SATA and PCIe-based drives. The M.2 slot also supports a U.2 adapter kit for installation of NVMe 2.5-inch drives like the Intel 750 series SSDs, and similar adapters are also available for boards from the likes of ASUS and MSI.

In addition, USB 3.1 Type-A and Type-C ports again make an appearance on the rear I/O panel, courtesy of the familiar ASMedia 1142 controller. Other standout features include a macro program called Key Master to help you program hotkeys and macros on both keyboard and mouse, and an external base clock generator for finer control over overclocking.



ASUS Z170-Deluxe

This board sits at the top of ASUS' lineup of mainstream Z170 boards, adorned with a striking white rear I/O cover and heat sinks. The Deluxe comes with premium features like 3x3 802.11ac Wi-Fi, five USB 3.1 Type-A ports, and one USB 3.1 Type-C port. Z170 does not support USB 3.1 on the chipset yet, so USB 3.1 functionality is provided by the ASMedia 1142 controller, which is the go-to controller for select boards from other brands, as well.

There are eight SATA 6Gbps (including two SATA Express ports) – two more than the six supported by the chipset. As with USB 3.1 functionality, ASUS has turned to the third-party ASM1061 controller to provide the additional SATA 6Gbps ports.

Networking is handled by dual Intel I219-V and I211-AT controllers – yet another example of the third-party controllers needed to provide additional functionality like Gigabit Ethernet. The first two full-length PCIe 3.0 slots will run in x8/x8 mode (16 lanes from the CPU) with dual-graphics cards, but the last slot actually only runs in x4 mode off the chipset itself.

An integrated 5-way Optimization feature automatically takes into account various use cases and optimizes your system for either performance or energy savings.







There are five USB 3.0 ports and two USB 3.1 ports (1 Type-A, 1 Type-C) on the rear I/O panel.

ASUS Maximus VIII Hero

Here's another board from ASUS; this time from its much-vaunted Republic of Gamers series. The gunmetal gray heat sinks with red accents are a joy to look at, and this board offers fairly good value in the ROG series.

Like the Z170-Deluxe, the Maximus VIII Hero ASM1061 controller makes a return to provide two SATA 6Gbps ports, on top of the six SATA 6Gbps from the chipset itself. In addition, the single M.2 slot can only run in PCIe 3.0 x4 mode from the chipset and will only support PCIe SSDs. And as expected of a board of this caliber, two USB 3.1 Type-A and Type-C ports are also found round the back.

Storage connectivity options aside, the board comes packed with standard ROG features like the upgraded SupremeFX 2015 audio circuitry, GameFirst network prioritization software, and a spanking-new RGB backlit ROG logo on the PCH heat sink.



Gigabyte Z170X Gaming G1

This top-end model from Gigabyte comes with metal-reinforced PCIe slots, a feature that's also found on select MSI boards. Notable features include a PLX chip to allow dual-graphics setups to run in x16/x16 mode, although it should be noted that this has more to do with PCIe lane switching rather than the provision of an extra 16 lanes.

There are also two PCIe 3.0 x4 M.2 slots, although installing drives in both of them will disable certain PCIe slots and SATA ports.

In addition, it combines dual Killer E2400 network ports with a Killer 1535 802.11ac dual-band Wi-Fi module for a gaming-oriented network solution. This means that it supports the Killer DoubleShot X3 Pro network manager, which automatically routes traffic across the fastest network interface (either one of the Gigabit Ethernet controllers or the Wi-Fi module).



MSI Z170A Gaming M5

The MSI Z170A Gaming M5 falls under MSI's top-end Performance series of motherboards, and as such, comes with a handful of gaming-oriented features. As the middle-of-the-pack model in the series, the Gaming M5 has shed features like a manual overclocking knob called Game Boost and a rear I/O cover.

It retains the new Killer E2400 Gigabit Ethernet controller, which adds features like the ability to prioritize network traffic for both websites and applications. The ASM1142 controller is responsible for USB 3.1 Type-A and Type-C connectivity, so you still get support for the fastest external storage devices.

One of the two onboard M.2 slots is also a SATA-only slot, and using it will disable a pair of SATA 6Gbps ports. The other is a PCIe 3.0 x4 slot, and it's a little strange to see that MSI hasn't opted to just let both ports use four PCIe lanes from the chipset.

Unique features include DDR4 Boost, which takes a leaf from the design of the audio circuitry and isolates the memory signals from the rest of the PCB in order to produce a cleaner signal. As on the Gigabyte board, metal-reinforced PCIe slots also make an appearance here.



More Intel 100 Series Chipsets

Z170 is Intel's mainstream, performance-oriented chipset, but Intel is also releasing five other Skylake-based chipsets for business users and consumers on a budget. H170 is a more budget-friendly version of Z170, lacking features like overclocking support and the ability to run multiple graphics card s, but otherwise retaining identical support for memory and storage configurations. H110 sits at the bottom of the consumer chipsets, dispensing with support for Intel RST and PCIe 3.0 from the chipset, and allowing only a single RAM module in each channel. The Q170, Q150, and B150 chipsets are targeted at business users, providing features like Small Business Advantage 3.0, Small Business Basics, and Intel vPro technology.



PICTURES ASUS, GIGABYTE, MSI, INTEL

DDR4 RAM for your new Skylake build

Motherboards aside, you'll be needing some new DDR4 RAM modules to go with your new build. DDR3 is no longer supported, so there's no porting over old RAM modules from your former system. Here are some DDR4 kits from the major manufacturers, complete with sleek brushed metal finishes and some aggressive military styling.

G.Skill Trident Z 8GB (2x4GB) DDR4 3600MHz

This overclocked 3600MHz kit is rated to run at an operating voltage of 1.35V. The heat spreaders sport a silver-gray brushed metallic finish, and a couple of notches towards one end help convey a suitably elegant yet sophisticated touch to the modules. If you're particular about aesthetics, we think the red-and-gray color scheme will go especially well with ASUS' Z170 ROG and MSI's Gaming series of boards.



Kingston Hyper X Fury 8GB (2x4GB) DDR4 2666MHz

The all-black heat spreaders are adorned with only the Fury and DDR4 branding in white text, alongside a slate-gray HyperX logo. As far as performance-oriented memory modules go, these are fairly plain and should go well with the look of most motherboards. In addition, it supports a convenient automatic overclocking feature, which enables the memory to boot up at its rated speed after installation.



Corsair Venageance LPX 8GB (2x4GB) DDR4 2400MHz

Designed for overclocking, the Vengeance LPX's heat spreader is made of pure anodized aluminum for quicker heat dissipation, as heat output can increase considerably at higher frequencies. There's also an eight-layer PCB to further help manage heat and provide improved overclocking headroom. Vengeance LPX kits are available in different colors – black, red, and blue – so you can pick the one that best suits your system.



Crucial Ballistix Tactical 8GB (2x4GB) DDR4 2666MHz

The gunmetal gray heat spreaders on these sticks are one of the more aggressive designs here, and we can't help but feel that they belong on a motherboard with a similarly military-esque design. The ASUS Z170 Sabertooth Mark I comes to mind, as do other boards with chunky VRM heat sinks, like the ASRock Z170 Gaming K6+. It runs at an operating voltage of 1.2V, and the heat spreaders have been designed for maximum heat dissipation.



G.Skill Ripjaws V 8GB (2x4GB) DDR4 2133MHz

The new Ripjaws V memory comes in an impressive array of five colors – Blazing Red, Steel Blue, Radiant Silver, Gunmetal Gray, and Classic Black. This particular kit comes in red, and unlike the more understated appeal of the Trident Z series, the Ripjaws V memory modules also boast an aggressive design clearly targeted at gamers. It runs at the default speed of 2133MHz, so if you aren't the overclocking type and want a relatively safe and stable kit, this is for you.

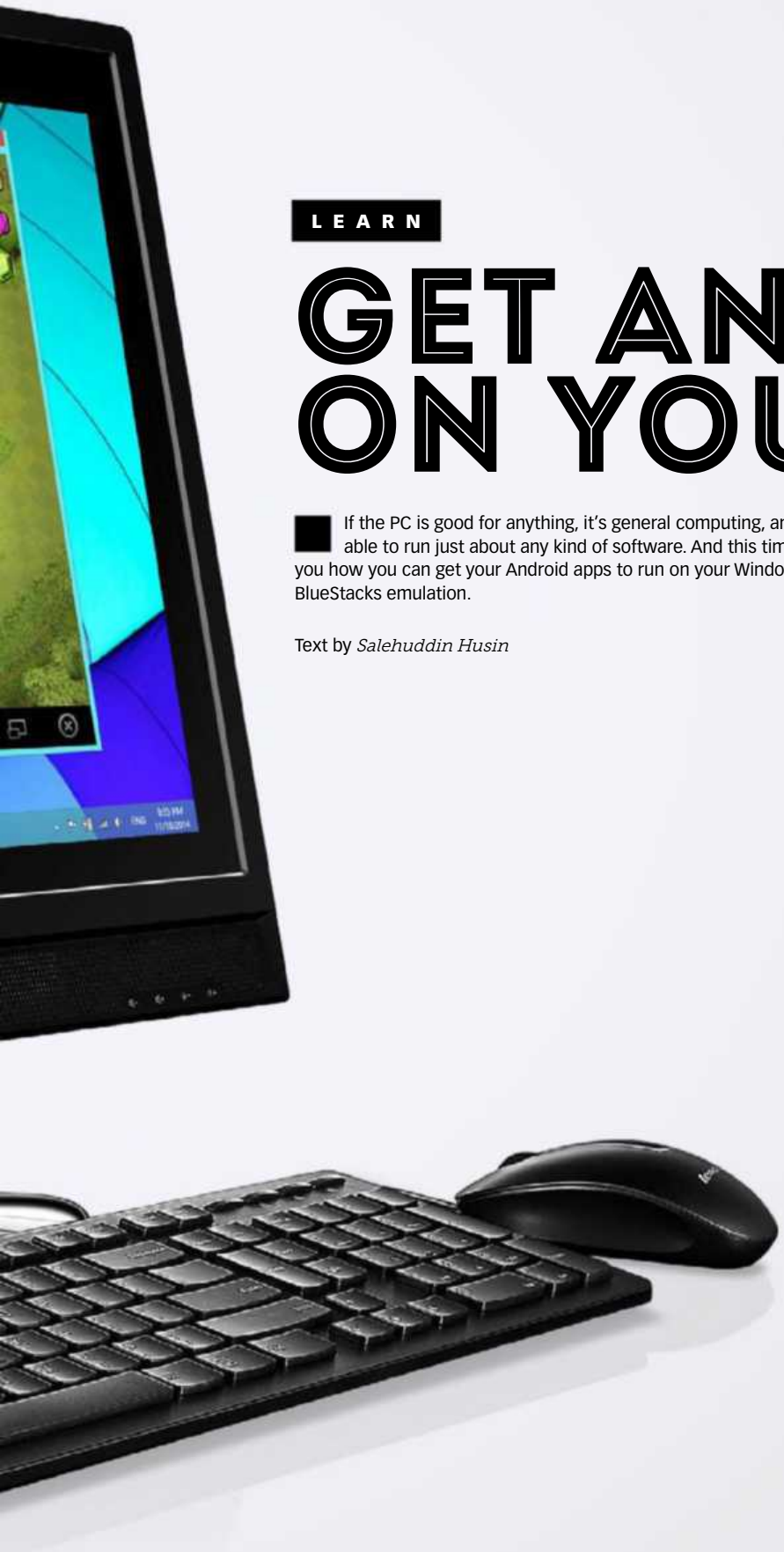


Kingston Hyper X Savage 8GB (2x4GB) DDR4 3000MHz

These Hyper X Savage DDR4 modules are equipped with low-profile, 32.8mm tall black heatspreaders to accommodate larger CPU coolers. The heatspreaders are constructed of die-cast aluminium for better heat dissipation and sport an asymmetrical, ridged design for a standout appearance. Black PCBs complete the all-black look, and these modules will likely go well with most motherboards, regardless of manufacturers' color choices. HWM




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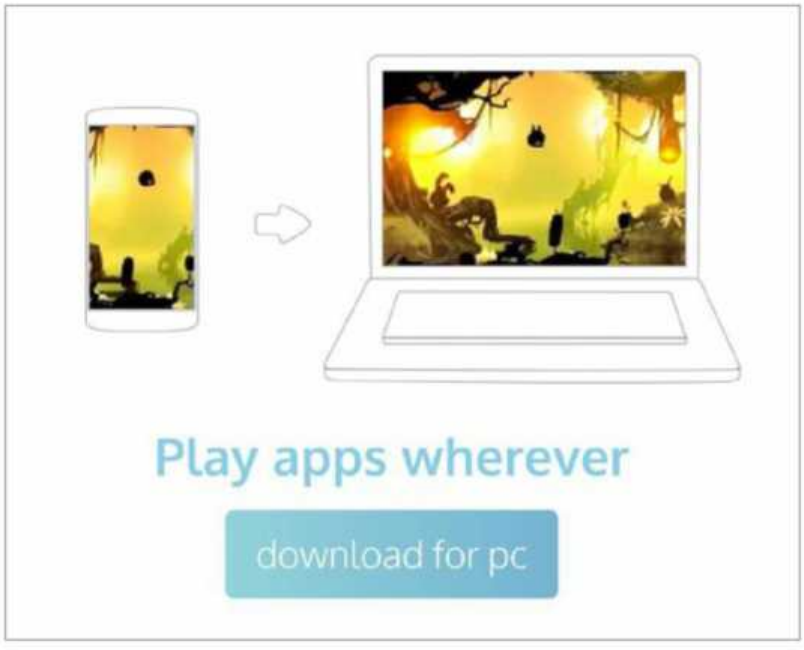
GET ANDROID ON YOUR PC

If the PC is good for anything, it's general computing, and by that, we mean being able to run just about any kind of software. And this time, we're going to show you how you can get your Android apps to run on your Windows machine through BlueStacks emulation.

Text by *Salehuddin Husin*

RUNNING ANDROID APPS ON A COMPUTER

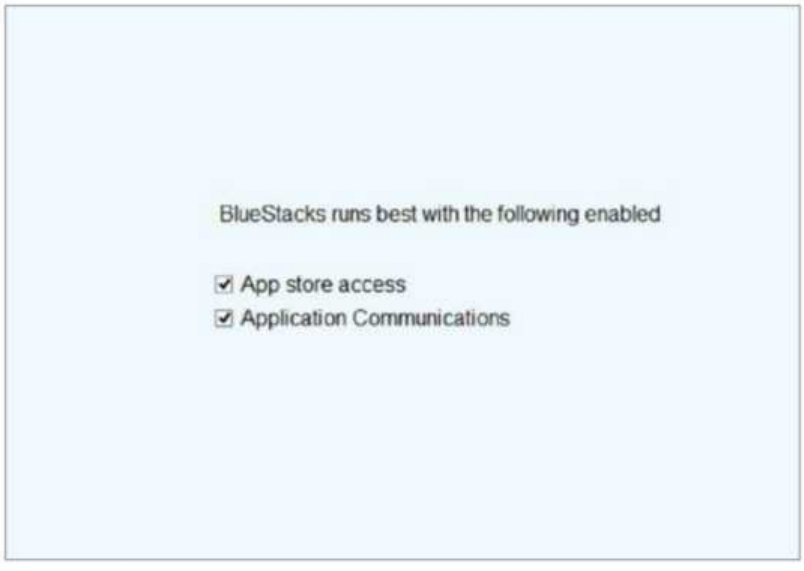
Are you an owner of a smartphone with a small display? Ever felt the frustration of hitting the wrong buttons on your teeny screen because of your oversized fingers? Did looking at a tablet with its massive display make you feel inadequate? Well, we have just the thing for you! Here's how to run Android apps on your desktop or notebook.



First off, you're going to want to start up your browser and go to www.bluestacks.com. There are a couple of different emulators out there that basically do the same thing, but we like BlueStacks because it's simple, fast, and easy to install. It's also one of the few with active developer support, so updates and fixes are forthcoming.

Once you've downloaded the appropriate version, you can go ahead and install it. For the purpose of this guide, we're installing the Windows version.

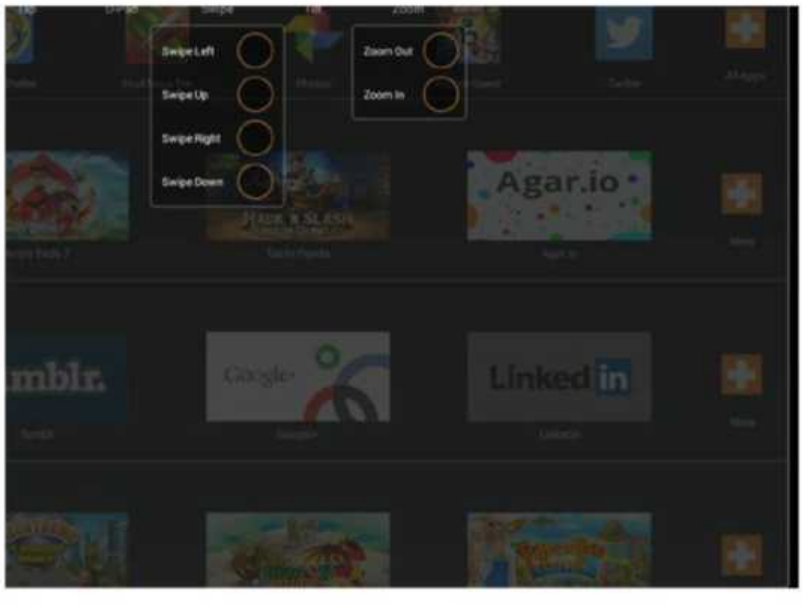
You can choose to install in any directory you want. When the option to install with App Store Access and Application Communications pops up, make sure both are ticked, or else you'll find that you can't access and download from the Google Play store. Once everything is done, the app should load right up into Google's Play store. From here on out, you simply choose whatever you want to download.



Controls are easy; it's just like you're using a phone. To select, you just click your left mouse button. If you need to tap and hold, just press and hold the left mouse button and move in a direction. It's all pretty intuitive.

Of course, you can even customize your controls if you're so inclined. Just select the Keyboard icon on the bottom-right of the screen to customize and use keyboard keys as shortcuts.

The other icons on the taskbar are to complete an action using a specified program, windowed mode, and to close BlueStacks.



If it's your first time using BlueStacks from the PC, you'll need to enter your Google ID to log in before you can download anything.

Before you do this, we highly recommend you go to settings in Gmail and enable two-step verification for your account. That way, nobody can access it without your knowledge.

If you've registered on Google to be alerted whenever your account is accessed, you should be receiving an alert soon saying that your account was accessed on a Samsung Note 3. That's normal; that's just BlueStacks emulating a Note 3 device.



Once you're all settled in, you can start exploring the Google Play store. Generally, everything an Android phone can do, you can now do on your computer. Yes, this even includes chat services like Whatsapp; though, with Whatsapp Web, we don't really see a point.



Other than that, you can play the numerous Android games and apps readily available on the store. We've tried a couple of games, ranging from Fallout Shelter to Fruit Ninja, and they work fine. Perhaps, there might be a game or two that might not be compatible with the program, but we haven't found one yet.

If you're an iOS user and wonder if the move to Android is worth it, or an Android user with a crappy phone, BlueStacks is something you'll definitely want to try out.





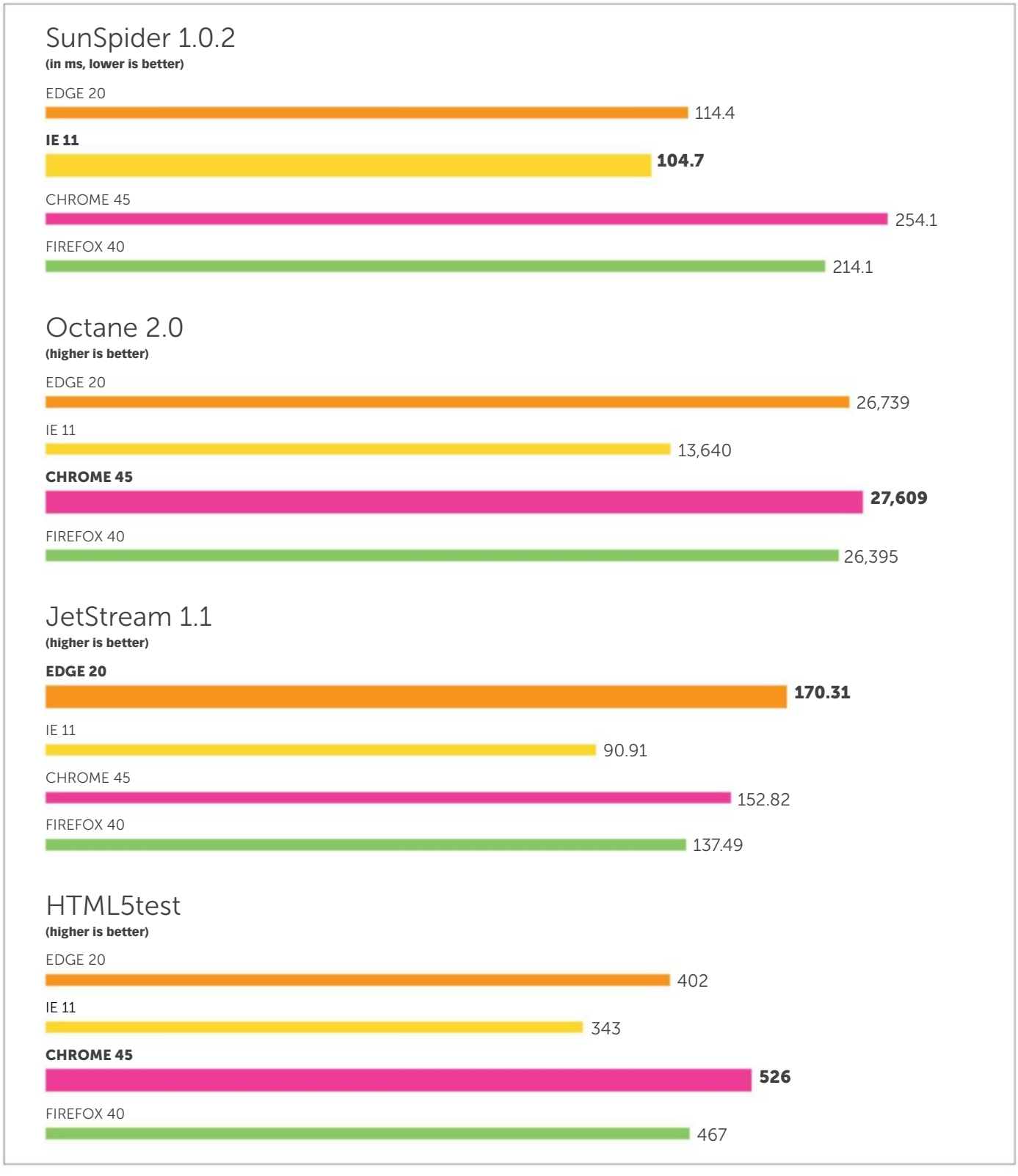
HOW FAST IS THE MICROSOFT EDGE BROWSER?

by *Ng Chong Seng*

When Windows 10 was finalized back in July, Microsoft came forth to claim that the OS' new bundled browser, Microsoft Edge, is "blazing fast" and is beating Chrome and Safari on their own JavaScript benchmarks. Now that we're a few months in, are the claims still true?

There are many ways to evaluate a browser, but raw performance should be the number one criteria. According to Microsoft in July, versus Google's Chrome, Edge is 112% faster in the WebKit SunSpider benchmark, 11% faster in the Google Octane benchmark, and 37% faster in the Apple JetStream benchmark.

But with Chrome being updated a couple of times since, is Edge still ahead today? Also, how does it stack up against other popular browsers, like Mozilla's Firefox and its own Internet Explorer? Using a system based on an Intel Core i7-5557U processor and the latest version of each browser at the time of writing, here are some benchmark results.



PICTURES MICROSOFT, GOOGLE, MOZILLA

With the exception of SunSpider, IE 11 has fallen behind all the other browsers in terms of pure JavaScript execution. As it stands, Edge is still leading in JavaScript performance, ahead of both Chrome and Firefox in the SunSpider and JetStream numbers, but about on par with both in Octane. There is no doubt that this is due to the EdgeHTML engine that the Edge browser is using exclusively.

Microsoft has also beefed up support for HTML5 in Edge and the HTML5test score reflects this improvement. That said, it still trails Chrome and Firefox, and lacks native support for Google's WebM video file format.

In short, the Microsoft Edge browser is fast and its performance numbers rank right up there with its illustrious peers. Other aspects like WebGL performance is also on the up, thanks to DirectX 12. With Windows now being positioned as a service, we expect Edge to be frequently updated, too. This is important, as any lead can be overtaken if you don't keep up. Just ask IE.

REMOVING UNWANTED APPS ON YOUR SAMSUNG GALAXY NOTE 5 AND S6 EDGE+

by *Ng Chong Seng*

The TouchWiz overlay on the Samsung Galaxy Note 5 and S6 Edge+ is the most streamlined we've seen so far, and this makes for a fast and smooth UI. While there isn't a lot of bloatware this time round, there are still some pre-installed apps that you may or may not want. Here are three ways – in order of difficulty – on how you can remove (or at least hide) them.

USING APPLICATION MANAGER

The easiest way to uninstall unwanted apps is through the Application Manager, which is found under Settings > Device > Applications. From there, find the All tab to see what's installed on your device. To prevent users from trashing items that are critical to the system's wellbeing, most can't be removed. But some apps can be uninstalled, such as Samsung Galaxy Life. For such apps, you will see an Uninstall button when you tap on them.

There will also be apps that are non-system critical, but can't be removed, such as some of the Google and Microsoft apps, utilities, and social media apps. For these apps, instead of Uninstall, you'll see a Disable button. This simply hides them from your app drawer and prevents them from running, so it doesn't help if you're trying to reclaim some storage space.

USING PACKAGE DISABLER PRO

But what if you wish to disable apps and services that the built-in Application Manager doesn't allow? You can turn to a third-party app on the Google Play store called Package Disabler Pro. This is an app specifically designed to disable unwanted packages on Samsung devices, and it doesn't require you to root the device.

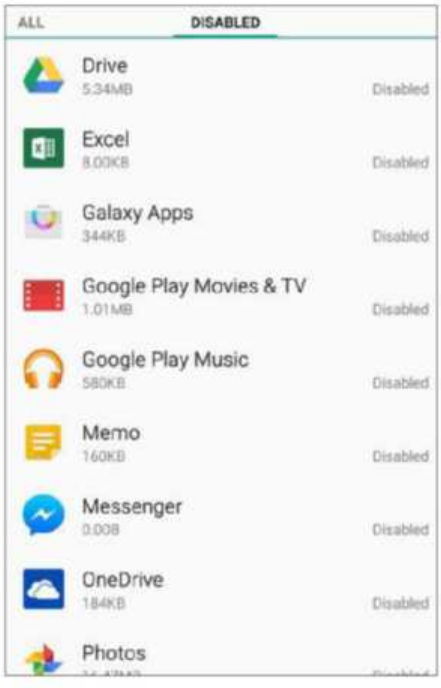
Disabling system apps in Package Disabler Pro is simple: just click on the package you want to disable. The free version has a limit on the number of packages you can disable (10 to 11), which is removed if you buy the full version that costs US$ 1.95. The full version also has advanced features, such as letting you export your disabled list, a search function, and a one-click bloatware removal tool. Of course, we only recommend disabling things that you're certain you don't need, and won't break critical system functions.

USING TITANIUM BACKUP

The most advanced way to control your apps and data is to use Titanium Backup, though it'll cost you US$ 5.99 to enable all its powers. This is the app that many hardcore users turn to when they want to backup/restore their apps, or remove, disable, or "freeze" them. This is a very powerful app that can be dangerous if not used correctly.

Also, to use Titanium Backup, you need a rooted device. In a nutshell, this means giving yourself and the app you've chosen unrestricted access to the system files. For the most part, we don't recommend rooting your Note 5 or S6 Edge+. It will trip Knox (a built-in Samsung security feature) and disqualify your device from using security-focused features, like Samsung Pay.

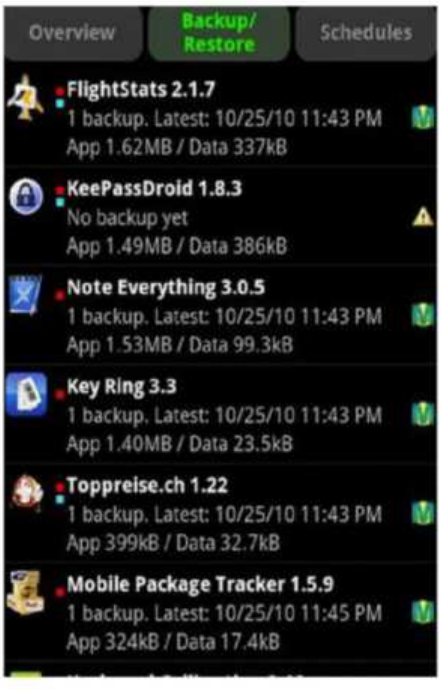
If you like to live dangerously, check out these two forum threads on XDA Developers (gohwz.ws/1NoPm0f and gohwz.ws/1NoPpJs) to find out more about rooting your new Galaxy devices.



The Application Manager is fairly restrictive, but you can still find some apps to disable in case you're really tired of them.



The best thing about Package Disabler Pro is that it lets you disable apps without requiring you to root the device.



For backing up, disabling, and restoring apps, Titanium Backup is the gold standard. But it needs a rooted device.

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Send in your entries via email to **editor.ph@hwzcorp.com** together with your name, address, and telephone number. For more information about the product, visit **www.facebook.com/Elecomph**.

The HWM Team congratulates the winners of the Belkin Single 2.1A USB Car Chargers from our October issue contest.



Terms and Conditions • This contest is open to all HWM readers except staff of Hardware Zone Phils. Corp. • The qualifying period for this contest is until 30 November 2015. • Only the winner(s) of the contest will be notified via email. • Winners are given 15 days to respond to the notification email and another 15 days since replying to claim their respective prizes. Prizes not claimed within this period will be forfeited. • Selection panel's decisions are final and no correspondence will be entertained. • Only one (1) entry per reader in a particular contest. • Should the specified prize be no longer available (e.g., phased out), the contest sponsor may change the prize to another product of similar or equal value. • By sending in your entries, you are agreeing to the above-mentioned terms and conditions.

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